This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

HN 1K6T A

THE MAN AND THE MOMENT

ELINOR GLYN

Digitized by Google

KD16701

Digitized by Google

Gift of The People of the United States
Through the Victory Book Campaign
(A. L. A. — A. R. C. — U. S. O.)
To the Armed Forces and Merchant Marine

W.B.CLARKE CO
BOOKSELLERS & STATIONERS
26 & 28 TRE
30 COURT ST

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE MAN AND THE MOMENT

Digitized by Google

By ELINOR GLYN

The Man and the Moment
Your Affectionate Godmother
The Point of View
Guinevere's Lover
Halcyone
The Reason Why
His Hour

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

175

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"It all looked very intimate and lover-like"

[Page 149]

Digitized by Google

THE MAN AND THE MOMENT

BY

ELINOR GLYN

AUTHOR OF "GUINEVERE'S LOVER," "HALCYONE," "THE REASON WHY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
R. F. JAMES

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1914

Digitized by Google

KD16701

COPYRIGHT, 1914, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1914, BY THE RED BOOK CORPORATION

Digitized by Google

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
"It all looked very intimate and lover-like"	*Frontispiece*
"He bounded forward to meet her"	48
"His solitary table was near theirs in the restaurant"	64
"'He is often in some scrape—something must have culminated to-night'"	224

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE MAN AND THE MOMENT

CHAPTER I

MICHAEL ARRANSTOUN folded a letter which he had been reading for the seventh time, with a vicious intentness, and then jumping up from the big leather chair in which he had been buried, he said aloud, "Damn!"

When a young, rich and good-looking man says that particular word aloud with a fearful grind of the teeth, one may know that he is in the very devil of a temper!

Michael Arranstoun was!

And, to be sure, he had ample reason, as you, my friend, who may happen to have begun this tale, will presently see.

It is really most irritating to be suddenly confronted with the consequences of one's follies at any age, but at twenty-four, when otherwise the whole life is smiling for one, it seems quite too hard.

The frightful language this well-endowed young gentleman now indulged in, half aloud and half in thought, would be quite impossible to put on paper! It contained what almost amounted to curses for a certain lady whose appearance, could she have been

Digitized by Google

seen at this moment, suggested that of a pious little saint.

"How the h—— can I keep from marrying her!" Mr. Arranstoun said more than aloud this time, and then kicking an innocent footstool across the room, he called his bulldog, put on his cap and stamped out on to the old stone balcony which opened from this apartment, and was soon stalking down the staircase and across the lawn to a little door in the great fortified wall, which led into the park.

He had hardly left the room when, from the wide arched doorway of his bed-chamber beyond, there entered Mr. Johnson, his superior valet, carrying some riding-boots and a silk shirt over his arm. You could see through the open door that it was a very big and comfortable bedroom, which had evidently been adapted to its present use from some much more stately beginning. A large, vaulted chamber it was, with three narrow windows looking on to the grim courtyard beneath.

Michael Arranstoun had selected this particular suite for himself when his father died ten years before, and his mother was left to spoil him, until she, too, departed from this world when he was sixteen.

What a splendid inheritance he had come into! This old border castle up in the north—and not a mortgage on the entire property! While, from his mother, a number of solid golden sovereigns flowed into his cof-

Digitized by Google

fers every year—obtained by trade! That was a little disgusting for the Arranstouns—but extremely useful.

It might have been from this same strain that the fortunate young man had also inherited that common sense which made him fairly level-headed, and not given as a rule to any over-mad taste.

The Arranstouns had been at Arranstoun since the time of those tiresome Picts and Scots—and for generations they had raided their neighbors' castles and lands, and carried off their cattle and wives and daughters and what not! They had seized anything they fancied, and were a strong, ruthless, brutal race, not much vitiated by civilization. These instincts of seizing what they wanted had gone on in them throughout eleven hundred years and more, and were there until this day, when Michael, the sole representative of this branch of the family, said "Damn!" and kicked a footstool across the room into the grate.

Mr. Johnson was quite aware of the peculiarity of the family. Indeed, he was not surprised when Alexander Armstrong remarked upon it presently. Alexander Armstrong was the old retainer, who now enjoyed the position of guide to the Castle upon the two days a week when tourists were allowed to walk through the state rooms, and look at the splendid carvings and armor and pictures, and the collection of plate.

Johnson had had time to glance over his master's correspondence that morning, which, with character-

Digitized by Google

istic recklessness, that gentleman had left upon his bed while he went to his bath, so his servant knew the cause of his bad temper, and had been prudent and kept a good deal out of the way. But the news was so interesting, he felt Alexander Armstrong really ought to share the thrill.

"Mrs. Hatfield's husband is dying," he announced, as Armstrong, very diffidently, peeped through the window from the balcony, and then, seeing no one but his friend the valet, entered the room.

Alexander Armstrong spoke in broad Scotch, but I shall not attempt to transcribe this barbaric language; sufficient to tell you that he made the excuse for his intrusion by saying that he had wanted to get some order from the master about the tourists.

"We shan't have any tourists when she's installed here as mistress!" Mr. Johnson remarked sepulchrally.

Armstrong was heard to murmur that he did not know what Mr. Johnson meant! This was too stupid!

"Why, I told you straight off Mrs. Hatfield's husband is dying," Johnson exclaimed, contemptuously. "She wrote one of her mauve billy doos this morning, telling the master so, and suggesting they'd soon be able to be married and happy—pretty cold-blooded, I call it, considering the poor man is not yet in his grave!"

Armstrong was almost knocked over by this statement; then he laughed—and what he said meant in

Digitized by Google

plain English that Mr. Johnson need not worry himself, for no Arranstoun had ever been known to be coerced into any course of conduct which he did not desire himself—not being hampered by consideration for women, or by any consideration but his own will. For the matter of that, a headstrong, ruthless race all of them and, as Mr. Johnson must be very well aware, their own particular master was a true chip of the old block.

"See his bonny blue eye—" (I think he pronounced it "ee"), "see his mouth shut like a game spring. See his strong arms and his height! See him smash the boughs off trees when they get in his way! and then tell me a woman's going to get dominion over him. Go along, Mr. Johnson!"

But Johnson remained unconvinced and troubled; he had had several unpleasant proofs of woman's infernal cunning in his own sphere of life, and Mrs. Hatfield, he knew, was as well endowed with Eve's wit as any French maid.

"We'll ha' a bet about it if you like," Armstrong remarked, as he got up to go, the clock striking three. He knew the first batch of afternoon tourists would be clamoring at the gate.

Mr. Johnson looked at the riding-boots in his hand.

"He went straight off for his ride without tasting a bite of breakfast or seeing Mr. Fordyce, and he didn't

Digitized by Google

return to lunch, and just now I find every article of clothing strewn upon the floor—when he came in and took another bath—he did not even ring for me—he must have galloped all the time; his temper would frighten a fighting cock."

Meanwhile, Michael Arranstoun was tramping his park with giant strides, and suddenly came upon his friend and guest, Henry Fordyce, whose very presence in his house he had forgotten, so turbulent had his thoughts been ever since the early post came in. Henry Fordyce was a leisurely creature, and had come out for a stroll on the exquisite June day upon his own account.

They exchanged a few remarks, and gradually got back to Michael's sitting-room again, and rang for drinks.

Mr. Fordyce had, by this time, become quite aware that an active volcano was going on in his friend, but had waited for the first indication of the cause. It came in the course of a conversation, after the footman had left the room and both men were reclining in big chairs with their iced whiskey and soda.

"It is a shame to stay indoors on such a day," Henry said lazily, looking out upon the balcony and the glittering sunshine.

"I never saw anyone enjoy a holiday like you do, Henry," Michael retorted, petulantly. "I can't enjoy anything lately. 'Pon my soul, it is worth going into

Digitized by Google

Parliament to get such an amount of pleasure out of a week's freedom."

But Henry did not agree that it was freedom, when even here at Arranstoun he had been pestered to patronize the local bazaar.

"The penalty of greatness! I wonder when you will be prime minister. Lord, what a grind!"

Mr. Fordyce stretched himself in his chair and lit a cigar.

"It may be a grind," he said, meditatively, "but it is for some definite idea of good—even if I am a slave; whereas you!—you are tied and bound to a woman—and such a woman! You have not been able to call your soul your own since last October as it is—and before you know where you are, you will be attending the husband's funeral and your own wedding in the same week!"

Michael bounded from his chair with an oath. "I'll be shot if I do!" he said, and sat down again. Then his voice grew a little uncertain, and he went on:

"It is worrying me awfully, though, Henry. If poor old Maurice does puff out—I suppose I ought to marry her—I——"

Mr. Fordyce stiffened, and the sleepy look in his gray eyes altered to a flash of steel.

"Let us have a little plain speaking, Michael, old boy. It is not as though I do not know the whole circumstance of your affair with Violet Hatfield. I warned

Digitized by Google

you about her in the beginning, when you met her at my sister Rose's, but, as usual, you would take your own course——"

Michael began to speak, but checked himself—and Henry Fordyce went on.

"I have had a letter from Rose this morning—as you of course know, Violet is staying for this Whitsuntide with them, having dragged her wretched husband, dying of consumption as he is, to this merry party. Well—Rose says poor Maurice is in a terrible state, caught a fresh cold on Saturday—and she adds, 'So I suppose we shall soon see Violet installed at Arranstoun as mistress.' "

"I know—I heard from Violet herself this morning," and Michael put his head down dejectedly.

"Ebbsworth is only thirty-five miles from here," Mr. Fordyce announced with meaning. "Violet can pop in on you at any moment, and she'll clinch the matter and bind you with her cobwebs before you can escape."

"Oh, Lord!"

"You know you are dead sick of her, Michael—and you know that I am not the sort of man who would ever speak of a woman thus without grave reason; but she does not care for you any more than the half a dozen others who occupied your proud position before your day—it is only for money and the glory of having you tied to her apron strings. It was not any good hammering on while the passion was upon you;

Digitized by Google

but I have watched you, and have seen that it is waning, so now's my time. With this danger in front of you, you have got to pull yourself together, old boy, and cut and run."

"That would be no use—" Then Michael stammered a little. "I say, Henry, I won't hear a word against her. You can thunder at me—but leave her out."

Mr. Fordyce smiled.

"Did she express deep grief at poor Maurice's condition in her letter?" he asked.

"Er—no—not exactly——"

"I thought not—she probably suggested all sorts of joys with you when she is free!"

There was an ominous silence.

Mr. Fordyce's voice now took on that crisp tone which his adversaries in the House of Commons so well knew meant that they must look to their guns.

"Delightful woman! A spider, I tell you, a roaring hypocrite, too, bamboozling poor Rose into thinking her a virtuous, persecuted little darling, with a noble passion for you, and my sister is a downright person not easily fooled. At this moment, Violet is probably shedding tears on her shoulder over poor Maurice, while she is plotting how soon she can become mistress of Arranstoun. Good God! when I think of it—I would rather get in a girl from the village and go through the ceremony with her, and make myself safe,

Digitized by Google

than have the prospect of Violet Hatfield as a wife. Michael, I tell you seriously, dear boy—you won't have the ghost of a chance if you are still unmarried when poor Maurice dies!"

Michael bounded from his chair once more. He was perfectly furious—furious with the situation—furious with the woman—furious with himself.

"Confound it, Henry, I—know it—but it does not mend matters your ranting there—and I am so sorry for the poor chap—Maurice, I mean—a very decent fellow, poor Maurice! Can't you suggest any way out?"

Mr. Fordyce mused a moment, while he deliberately puffed smoke, Michael's impatience increasing so that he ran his hands through his dark, smooth hair, whose shiny, immaculate brushing was usually his pride!

"Can't you suggest a way out?" he reiterated.

Mr. Fordyce did not reply—then after a moment: "You were always too much occupied with women, Michael—from your first scrape when you left Eton; and over this affair you have been a complete fool."

Michael was heard to swear again.

"You have been inconsistent, too, because you did not even employ your usual ruthless methods of doing what you pleased with them. You have simply drifted into allowing this vile creature's cobwebs to cling on to your whole existence until you are almost paralyzed,

Digitized by Google

and it seems to me that an immediate marriage with someone else is your only way of escape. Such a waste of your life! Just analyze the position. You have everything in the world, this glorious place—an old name—money—prestige—and if your inclinations do run to the material side of things instead of the intellectual, they are still successful in their demonstration. No one has a better eye for a horse, or is a finer shot. The best at driven grouse for your age, my boy, I have ever seen. You are full of force, Michael, and ought to do some decent thing—instead of which you spoil the whole outlook by fooling after this infernal woman—and you have not now the pluck to cut the Gordian knot. She will drag you to the lowest depths——"

Then he laughed. "And only think of that voice in one's ears all day long! I would rather marry old Bessie at the South Lodge. She is eighty-four, she tells me, and would soon leave you a widower."

The first ray of hope shot into Michael's bright blue eyes—and he exclaimed with a kind of joy, as he seized Binko, his bulldog, by his fat, engaging throat:

"Bessie! Old Bessie— By Jove, what an idea!—the very thing. She'd do it for me like a shot, dear old body!"

Binko gurgled and slobbered in sympathy.

"She would be kind to you, too, Binko. She would not say she found your hairs on every chair, and that

Digitized by Google

you dribbled on her dress! She would not tell your master that he left his cigarette-ash about, and she hated the smell of smoke! She would not want this room for her boudoir, she——"

Then he stopped his flow of words, suddenly catching sight of the whimsical, sardonic smile upon his friend's face.

"Oh, Lord!" he mumbled, contritely. "I had forgotten you were here, Henry. I am so jolly upset."

"This heartlessness about poor Maurice has finished you, eh?" Mr. Fordyce suggested. He felt he might be gaining his end.

Michael covered his face with his hands.

"It seems so ghastly to think of marriage with the poor chap not yet dead—I am fairly knocked over—it really is the last straw—but she will cry and make a scene—and she has certainly arguments—and it will make one feel such a cad to leave her."

"She wrote that—did she?—wrote of marriage and her husband's last attack of hemorrhage in the same paragraph, I suppose. Michael, it is revolting! My dear boy, you must break away from her—and then do try to occupy yourself with more important things than women. Believe me, they are all very well in their way and in their proper place—to be treated with the greatest courtesy and respect as wives and mothers—even loved, if you will, for a recreation—but as vital factors in a man's real life! My dear fellow, the idea

Digitized by Google

is ridiculous—that life should be for his country and the development of his own soul——"

Michael Arranstoun laughed.

"Jolly old Mohammedan! You think women have none, I suppose!"

Henry Fordyce frowned, because it was rather true —but he denied the charge.

"Nothing of the sort. Merely, I see things at their proper balance and you cannot."

Michael leaned back in his chair; he was quieter for a moment.

"I only see what I want to see, Henry—and I am a savage—I cannot help it—we have always been so. When I fancy a woman, I must obtain her—when I want a horse, I must have it. It is always *must*—and we have not done so badly. We still possess our shoulders and chins and strength after eleven hundred years of it!" and he stretched out a splendid arm, with a force which could have felled an ox.

An undoubtedly fine specimen of British manhood he looked, sitting there in the June sunlight, which came in a shaft from the south mullioned window in the corner beyond the great fireplace, the space between occupied by a large picture of uncertain date, depicting the landing of Mary, Queen of Scots, in her northern kingdom.

His eyes roamed to this.

"One of my ancestors was among that party," he

Digitized by Google

said, pointing to a figure. "He had just killed a Moreton and stolen his wife, that is why he looks so perky—the fellow in the blue doublet."

Mr. Fordyce rose from his chair and fired his last shot.

"And now a female spider is going to paralyze the last Arranstoun, and rule him for the rest of his days, sapping his vitality."

But Michael protested.

"By heaven, no!"

"Well, I'll leave you to think about it. I am going for another stroll on this lovely day." He had got to the window by this time, which looked into the courtyard on the opposite side to the balcony. "Goodness! what a party of tourists! It is a bore for you to have them all over the place like this! To own a castle with state rooms to be shown to the public has its disadvantages."

Michael looked at them, too, a large party of Americans, mostly of that class which compose the tourists of all countries, and which no nation feels proud to own. He had seen hundreds of such, and turned away indifferently.

"They only come here twice a week, and it has been allowed for such ages—they are generally quiet, and fortunately their perambulations close at the end of the gallery. They don't intrude upon my own suite. They get to the chapel by the outside door."

Digitized by Google

Henry crossed the room and went on to the balcony.

"Mrs. Hatfield will alter all that," he laughed, as he disappeared from view.

Michael flashed a rageful glance at his back, and then flung himself into his great armchair again, and pulled the wrinkled mass, which called itself a prize bulldog, on to his lap.

"I believe he's right and we are caught, Binko. If we fled to the Rocky Mountains, she would track us. If we stay and face it, she'll make an almighty scandal and force us to marry her. What in the devil's name are we to do——!"

Binko licked his master's hands, and made noises so full of gurgling, slobbering sympathy, no heart could have remained uncomforted. Who knows! His canine common sense may have telepathically transmitted a thought, for Michael suddenly plopped him on the floor, and stalked toward the fireplace to ring the bell, while he exclaimed, as though answering a suggestion. "Yes, we'll send for old Bessie—that's the only way."

But before he could reach his goal, the picture of Mary, Queen of Scots, landing fell forward with a crash, and through the aperture of a secret door which it concealed, there tumbled a very young and pretty girl right into the room.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

MR. ARRANSTOUN was extremely startled and annoyed, too, and before he took in the situation, he had exclaimed, while Binko gave an ominous growl of displeasure:

"Confound it—who is that! These are private rooms!" Then, seeing it was a girl on the floor, he said in another voice: "Quiet, Binko—" and the dog retired to his own basket under a distant table. "Oh, I beg your pardon—but——"

The creature on the floor blinked at Michael with large, round, violet eyes, but did not move, while she answered aggrievedly—with a very faint accent, whether a little French or a little American, or a little of both, he was not sure, only that it had something attractive about it.

"You may well say 'but'! I did not mean to intrude upon your private room—but I had to run away from Mr. Greenbank—he was so horrid—" here she gasped a little for breath—"and I happened to see something like a door ajar in the Gainsborough room, so I fled through it, and it fastened after me with a

Digitized by Google

snap—I could not open it again—and it was pitch dark in that dreadful passage and not a scrap of air—I felt suffocated, and I pushed on anywhere—and something gave way and I fell in here—that's all——"

She rattled this out without a stop, and then stared at Michael with her big, childish eyes, but did not attempt to rise from the floor.

He walked toward her and held out his hand, and with ceremonious and ironical politeness, he began:

"May I not help you—I could offer you a chair——"

She interruped him while she struggled up, refusing his proffered hand.

"I've knocked myself against your nasty table—why do you have it in that place!"

Michael sat down upon the edge of it, and went on in his ironical tone:

"Had I known I was to have the honor of this visit, I should certainly have had it moved."

"There is no use being sarcastic," the girl said, almost crying now. "It hurts very much, and—and—I want to go home."

Mr. Arranstoun pushed a comfortable monster seat toward her, and said more sympathetically:

"I am very sorry—but where is home?"

The girl sank into the chair, and smoothed out her pink cotton frock; the skimpy skirt (not as narrow as

Digitized by Google

in these days, but still short and spare!) showed a perfect pair of feet and ankles.

"She's American, of course, then," Michael said to himself, observing these, "and quite pretty if that smudge of grime was off her face."

She was looking at him now with her large, innocent eyes, which contained no shadow of *gêne* over the unusual situation, and then she answered quite simply:

"I haven't a home, you know—I'm just staying at the Inn with Uncle Mortimer and Aunt Jemima and—and—Mr. Greenbank—and we are tourists, I suppose, and were looking at the pictures—when—when I had to run away."

Michael felt a little piqued with curiosity; she was a diversion after his perplexing, irritating meditations.

"It would be so interesting to hear why you ran away—the whole story?" he suggested.

The girl turned her head and looked out of the window, showing a dear little baby profile, and masses of light brown hair rolled up anyhow at the back. She did not look older than seventeen at the outside, and was peculiarly childish and slender for that.

"But I should have to tell you from the beginning, and it is so long—and you are a stranger."

Michael drew another chair nearer to her, and sat down, while his manner took on a note of grave, elderly concern, which rather belied the twinkle of mischief in his eyes.

Digitized by Google

"Never mind that—I am sympathetic, and I am your host—and, by Jove!—won't you have some tea! You look awfully tired and—dusty," and he rang the bell, and then reseated himself. "See, to be quite orthodox, we will make our own introduction—I am Michael Arranstoun—and you are——?"

The girl rose and made him a polite bow. "I am Sabine Delburg," she announced. He bowed also—and then she went into a peal of silvery laughter that seemed to contain all the glad notes of spring and youth. "Oh, this is fun! and I—I should like some tea!" She caught sight of herself in an old mirror, which stood upon a commode. "Goodness, what a guy I look! Why didn't you tell me that my hat was crooked!" She settled it straight, and began searching for a handkerchief up her sleeve and in her belt, but none was to be found.

So Mr. Arranstoun handed her a clean one he chanced to have in his pocket. "I expect you want to wipe the smudge of dirt off your face," he hazarded.

She took it laughing, and showing an even row of beautiful teeth between red, full baby lips.

"You are the owner of this castle," she went on, as she gave firm rubs at the velvet pink cheeks. "That must be nice. You can do what you like, I suppose," and here a sigh of regret escaped and made her voice lower.

Digitized by Google

"I wish I *could*," Mr. Arranstoun answered feelingly.

"Well, if I were *a man*, I would!"

"What would you do?"

She turned and faced him, while she said, with extreme solemnity:

"I should never marry Mr. Greenbank."

Michael laughed.

"I don't suppose you would if you were a man!" At this moment, a footman answered the bell. "Bring tea, please," his master ordered, inwardly amused at the servant's astonished face, and then when they were alone again, he continued his sympathetic questioning.

"Who is Mr. Greenbank? You had to flee from him—you said he was horrid, I believe?"

Miss Delburg had removed her hat, and was trying to tidy her hair before readjusting it; she had the hatpin in her mouth. but took it out to answer vehemently:

"So he is, a pig! And I went and got engaged to him this morning! You see," turning to the glass again, quite unembarrassed, "I can't get my money until I am married—and Uncle is so disagreeable, and Aunt Jemima nags all day long, and it was left in Papa's will that I was to live with them—and I don't come of age until I am twenty-one, but I can get the money directly if I marry—I was seventeen in May, and of course no one could stand it till twenty-one! Mr.

Digitized by Google

Greenbank is the only person who has asked me, and Aunt Jemima says no one else ever will! I have been out of the Convent for a whole month, and I can't bear it."

Michael was beginning really to enjoy himself. She was something so fresh, so entirely different to anything he had ever seen in his life before. There was nothing of shyness or awkwardness in her manner, as any English girl would have shown. She was absolutely at ease, with a childish, confiding innocence which he saw plainly was real, and not put on for his benefit. It was almost incredible in these up-to-date days. A most engaging morsel of seventeen summers, he decided, as he answered with over-grave concern:

"What a hard fate!—but you have not told me yet why you ran away!"

The girl had finished her toilet by now, and reseated herself with a grown-up air in the big armchair.

"Oh! well, he was just—horrid—that was all," and then abruptly turning the conversation, "It is a nice place you have here, and it does feel lovely doing something wrong like this—having tea with you, I mean. You know, I have never spoken to a young man before. The Nuns always told us they were dreadful creatures—but you don't look so bad—" and she examined her host critically.

Michael accepted the implied appreciation.

"What is Mr. Greenbank, then?"

Digitized by Google

The silver laugh rang out again, while she jumped up and peeped from the window into the courtyard.

"Samuel—he's only a thing! Oh! Uncle and Aunt would be so angry if they could see me here! And I expect they are all in a fine fuss now to know what has happened to me! They never saw me go through the door, and I hope they think that I've committed suicide out of one of the windows. Look!" and she danced excitedly, "there is Uncle talking to the commissionaire. Oh, what fun!"

Mr. Arranstoun peeped, too—and saw a spare, elderly American of grim appearance in anxious confab with Alexander Armstrong.

The whole situation struck him as delightful, and he laughed gaily, while he suggested: "You are perhaps rather a difficult charge?"

Miss Delburg resented this at once.

"What an idea! How would you like to marry Mr. Greenbank, or stay with Aunt Jemima for four years!"

"Well, you see, I can't comtemplate it, as I am not a girl!"

Again those white teeth showed, and the violet eyes were suffused with laughter.

"No! Of course not. How silly I am—but I mean, how would you care to be forced to do something you did not like?"

Michael thought of his own fate.

"By Jove! I should hate it!"

Digitized by Google

"Well—you can understand me!"

Then the door opened, and the butler and footman brought in the tea, eyeing their master's guest furtively, while they maintained that superbly aloof manner of well-bred English servants. The pause their entrance caused gave Mr. Arranstoun time to think, and an idea gradually began to unfold itself in his brain—and unconsciously he took out, and then replaced in his breast pocket, a mauve, closely-written letter, while a frown of deep cogitation crept over his face.

Miss Delburg, for her part, was only thrilled with the sight of the very agreeable tea, and after waiting a moment to see what her preoccupied host would do when the servants left the room, hunger forced her to fall to the temptation of a particularly appetizing chocolate cake, which she surreptitiously seized, and began munching with the frank joy of a child.

"I do love them!" she sighed, "and we never were allowed them, only once a month after Moravia Cloudwater got that awful toothache, and had to have a big grinder pulled out."

Michael was paying no attention to her; he had walked rapidly up and down the room once or twice, much to her astonishment.

At last he spoke.

"I have an idea—but first let me give you some tea—No—do help yourself," then he paused awkwardly, and she at once proceeded to fill her cup.

Digitized by Google

Binko had condescended to emerge from his basket under the table. Tea-time was an hour when he allowed himself to take an interest in human beings.

"Oh! you darling!" the girl cried, putting down her cup. "You fat, lovely, wrinkly darling!"

"He is a nice dog," his master admitted; his voice was actually nervous—and he pulled Binko to him by his solid, fleshy paws, while he sat down in his chair again.

Miss Delburg had got back into her seat, where she munched a cake and continued her tea. The chair was so deep and long that her little bits of feet did not nearly reach the ground, but dangled there.

"Mayn't I pour you out some, too?" she asked, getting forward again. "I do love to pour out —and do you take sugar—? I like lumps and lumps of it."

"Oh—er—yes," Michael agreed absently, and then he went on with the determined air of a person getting something off his chest. "I hardly know how to say what I am thinking of, it sounds so strange. Listen— I also must marry someone—anyone—to avert a fate I don't want—What do you say to marrying *me*?"

The teapot came down into the tray with a bump, while the round, childish eyes grew like saucers with astonishment.

"Oh!"

"I dare say it does surprise you—" Michael then

Digitized by Google

hastened to add. "I mean, we should only go through the ceremony, of course, and you could get your money and I my freedom."

The girl clasped her hands round her knees.

"And I should never have to see you again?" in a glad voice of comprehension.

Michael leaned forward nearer to her.

"Well—no—never, unless you wished."

Miss Delburg actually kicked her feet with delight.

"It is a perfectly splendid suggestion," she announced. "We could just oblige one another in this way, and need never see or speak to each other again. What made it come into your head? Do you really think we could do that—Oh! how rude of me—I've forgotten to pour out your tea!"

"Never mind, talking about—our marriage—is more interesting," and Mr. Arranstoun's blue eyes filled with mischievous appreciation of the situation, even beyond the seriousness of the discussion he meant to carry to an end. But this aspect did not so much concern Miss Delburg, as that she had let slip a particular pleasure for the moment, that of being allowed a teapot in her own hand, instead of being given a huge bowl of milk with a drop of weak coffee mixed in it, and watching a like fate fall upon her companions.

When this delightful business was accomplished to her satisfaction, her sweet little round face a model of serious responsibility the while, she handed Michael

Digitized by Google

the cup and drew herself back once more into the depth of the giant chair.

"I can't behave nicely in this great creature," she said, patting the fat cushioned arms, "and the Mother Superior would be horribly shocked, but don't let's mind. Now, do tell me something about this plan. You see," gravely, "I really don't know the world very well yet—I have always been at the Convent near Tours until a month ago—even in the holidays, since I was seven—and the Sisters never told me anything about outside, except that it was a place of pitfalls and that men were dreadful creatures. I was very happy there, except I wanted to get out all the time, and when I did and found Uncle and Aunt more tiresome than the Sisters—there seemed no help for it—only Mr. Greenbank. So I accepted him this morning. But—" and this awful thought caused her whole countenance to change. "Now I come to think of it, the usual getting married means you would have to stay with the man—wouldn't you? And he wants—he wants to kiss—I mean," hurriedly, "you would be lovely to marry because I would never have to see you again!"

Michael Arranstoun put his head back and laughed; she was perfectly delicious—he began to dislike Mr. Greenbank.

His tea was quite forgotten.

"Er—of course not," he agreed. "Well, I could get

Digitized by Google

a special license, if you could tell me exactly how you stand, and your whole name and your parents' names, and everything, and we could get their consent—but I conclude your father, at least, is no longer alive."

Miss Delburg had a very grown-up air now.

"No, my parents are both dead," she told him. "Papa three years ago, and Mamma for ages, and I never saw them much anyhow. They were always travelling about, and Mamma was a Frenchwoman and a Catholic. Her family did not speak to her because she married a Protestant and an American. And the worry it was for me being brought up in a convent! because Papa would have me a Protestant, so I do believe I have got a little religion of my own that is not like either!"

"Yes?"

She continued her narrative in the intervals of the joy of munching another cake.

"Papa was very rich, and it's all mine— Only it appears he did not approve of the freedom of American women—and so tied it up so that I can't get it until I am an old maid of twenty-one—or get married. Is it not disgusting?"

Michael's thoughts were now concentrating upon the vital points.

"But have you not got a guardian or something?"

"Not exactly. Only an old lawyer person who is now in London. I have seen Papa's will, and I know

Digitized by Google

I can marry when and whom I like if I get his consent—and he would give it in a minute, he is sick of me!"

"How fortunate!" Then restlessness seized him again, and he got up, gulped down his tea, and began his pacing.

"I do think it would be a good plan, and we must do it if we can get this person's leave—Yes, and do it quickly before we change our minds, or something interferes. Everyone would think we were perfectly mad, but as it suits us both, that is no one's business—Only —you are rather young—and er—I don't know Greenbank. You are sure he is horrid?"

The girl clasped her hands together with force.

"Sure! I should think so— He wears glasses, and has nasty, scrabbly bits of fur on his face, which he thinks is a beard, and he is pompous and he talks like this," and she imitated a precise Boston voice. 'My dear Sabine—have you considered,' and he is lanky—and Oh! I detest him, and I can't imagine why I ever said I would marry him—but if I don't, what *am* I to do with Aunt Jemima for four years! I should die of it."

Michael sat on the edge of the table and looked at her long and deeply. He took in the childish picture she made in the big chair. He had no definite appreciation then of her charm, his mind was too fixed upon what seemed a prospect of certain escape from Violet Hatfield and her cunning thirty years of experience. This young thing could not interfere with him, and

Digitized by Google

divorces in Scotland were not impossible things—they would both gain what they wanted for the time, and it was a fair bargain. So he said, after a moment:

"I will go up to London to-morrow, and if it is as you say that you are free to marry whom and when you will, I will try to get this old lawyer's consent and a special license—But how about your Uncle? Has he not any legal right over you?"

Miss Delburg laughed contentedly.

"Not in the least—only that I have to live with him until I am married. Mr. Parsons—that's the lawyer's name—hates him, and he hates Mr. Parsons. So I know Mr. Parsons will be delighted to spite him by giving his consent, if you just say Uncle Mortimer is trying to force me into a marriage against my will with his nephew—Samuel Greenbank is his nephew, you know—no relation to me. It is Aunt Jemima who is Papa's sister."

All this seemed quite convincing. Michael felt relieved.

"I see," he said. "Well, it appears simple enough. I believe I could be back by Thursday, and I could have my chaplain and a friend of mine, and we could get the affair over in the chapel—and then you can go back to the Inn with your certificate—and I can go to Paris—free!" And his thoughts added, "And even if poor Maurice does die soon, I need fear nothing!"

Now that their two fates seemed settled, Miss Del-

Digitized by Google

burg got out of the chair and stood up in a dignified way; her soft cheeks were the color of a glowing pink rose, and her violet eyes shone with fun and excitement, her little, irregular features and perfect teeth seemed to add to the infantine aspect of the picture she made in her unfashionable pink cotton frock. Dress had been strongly discouraged at the Convent, and was looked upon by Aunt Jemima, a strict New Englander, as a snare of the devil, but even the garment, in the selecting of which she had had no hand, seemed to hang with grace upon the child's slim figure.

Not a doubt as to the future clouded her thoughts; it was all a glorious piece of fun, and of all the daring tricks she had perpetrated at the Convent to get chocolates, or climb a tree, or have a midnight orgy of cake and sirop, none had been so exciting as this—to go through the ceremony of marriage and be free for life!

Her education had been of the most elementary, and the whole aim of those placed over her had been to keep her as innocent and ignorant as a child of ten. Not a single problem of life had ever presented itself to her naturally intelligent mind. She had read no books, conversed with no grown-up people, played with no one but her companions, three American girls and a few French ones, and the simple Nuns. And since her emancipation, she had but wandered in the English lakes with her uncle and aunt and Samuel Greenbank, and so had come to Arranstoun like any other tourist

Digitized by Google

to see this famous castle still inhabited after eleven hundred years.

In these days of women giving daily proof of their capability for irritating mischief, if not of their ability to rule nations, Sabine Delburg was a very unique being, and could not have existed but for a combination of rare circumstances, as she was half American and half French and had inherited the quick understanding of both nations. But from the age of seven, she had never seen the outside world. It is not my place, in any case, to explain what she was or was not. The creature, with all her faults and charms, is there to speak for herself—and if you, my friend, who are reading this tale on a summer's day do not feel you want to hear any more of what happened to these two young things, by all means put down the book and go your way!

So let us get back to Mr. Arranstoun's sitting-room and the June afternoon, and we shall hear Miss Delburg saying, in her childish voice of joy:

"Nothing could be better—I always did like doing mad things. It will be the greatest fun! Think of their faces when I prance in and say I am married! Then I will snap my fingers at them and go off and see the world."

Michael knelt upon a low old *prie dieu* which was near, and looked into her face—while he asked, whimsically:

Digitized by Google

"I do wonder where you will begin."

Miss Delburg now sat upon the edge of the table; this was a grave question and must be answered at leisure, though without indecision.

"Oh, I know," she announced. "There was my great friend, Moravia Cloudwater, at the Convent. She was older than me, and went to Paris with her father and married an Italian prince last year. I have heard from her since, and she has often wanted me to go and stay with her in Rome—and I shall now. Morri and I are the dearest friends—and her things did look lovely the day she came to see us at Tours—with the prince's coronet on them—" and then the first shadow came to her contentment. "That is the only pity about you—even with a castle, you haven't a coronet, I suppose?" regretfully. "I should have liked one on my handkerchiefs and note-paper."

Michael felt his shortcomings.

"The title was taken away when we followed Prince Charlie and we only got back the land by the skin of our teeth after an awful business so I am afraid I cannot do that for you—but perhaps," consolingly, "you will have better luck next time."

This brought some comfort.

"Why, of course! we can get a divorce—as soon as we want. Moravia had an aunt, who simply went to Sioux Falls and got one at once and married someone else, so it's not the least trouble. Oh, I am

Digitized by Google

glad you have thought of this plan. It is clever of you!"

Mr. Arranstoun felt that he was becoming rather too interested in his—*fiancée* and time was passing. Her family might discover where she was—or Henry might return; he must clinch matters finally.

"I think we must come to business details now," he said. "Had you not better write a letter to Mr. Parsons that I could take, stating your wishes; and will you also write down upon another piece of paper all the details of your name, age—and so forth——"

He now showed her his writing-table and gave her paper and pens to choose from.

She sat down gravely, and put her hands to her head as one thinking hard. Then she began rapidly to write —while Mr. Arranstoun watched her from the hearth-rug, to where he had retired.

She evidently wrote out the statistics required first, and then began her letter. And at last she turned a rogue's face with a perplexed frown on it, while she bit her pen.

"How do you spell indigenous, please?"

He started forward.

"'Indigenous'?—what a grand word!—i-n-d-i-g-e-n-o-u-s."

"One has to be grand when writing business letters," she told him, condescendingly, and then finished her missive.

Digitized by Google

"There—that will do! Now listen!"

She got up and stood with the sheet in her hand, and read off the remarkable document without worrying much about stops or commas.

"DEAR MR. PARSONS:

"Papa said I could marry who I wanted to provided that he was decent, so please give your written consent to the *grand seigneur* who brings this. His name is Arranstoun, and he is indigenous to this Castle, and really an aristocrat who papa and mamma would have approved of, although he unfortunately has no title——"

"I had to put in that, you see," and she looked up explainingly, "because it sounds so ordinary if he'd never heard of Arranstoun—we wouldn't have, only Uncle Mortimer was looking out for old ruins to visit —well," and she continued her recital, while Michael lowered his head to hide the smile in his eyes.

"We wish to get married on Thursday so please be quick about the consent, as Uncle Mortimer wants me to marry his nephew, Samuel Greenbank, who I hate. Agree, sir, the expression of my sentiments, the most distinguished

"SABINE DELBURG."

"P. S. I will want all my money, 50,000 dollars a year I believe it is, on Friday morning."

Then she looked up with pride.

Digitized by Google

"Don't you think that will do?"

Michael was overcome—his voice shook with enchanted mirth.

"Admirably," he assured her, with what solemnity he could.

Sabine seemed thoroughly satisfied with herself.

"That's all right, then. Now I must be off, or they will be coming to look for me, and that would be a bore."

"But we have not made all the arrangements for our wedding." The prospective bridegroom thought it prudent to remind her. "When can you come on Thursday? My train gets in about six."

"Thursday," and she contracted her dark eyebrows. "Let me see— Yes, we are staying until Saturday to see the remains of Elbank Monastery—but I don't know how I can slip away, unless—only it would be so late. I could say I had a headache and go to bed early without dinner, and get here about eight while they were having theirs. It is still quite light—I often had to pretend things at the Convent to get a moment's peace."

Michael reflected.

"Better not chance eight—as you say it is quite light then and they might see you. Slip out of the hotel at nine. The park gate is, as you know, right across the road. I will wait for you inside, and we can walk here in a few minutes— and come up these balcony steps—

Digitized by Google

and the chapel is down that passage—through this door. See."

He went and opened the door, and she followed him —talking as she walked.

"Nine! Oh! that is late—I have never been out so late before—but it can't matter—just this once—can it? And here in the north it is so funny; it is light at nine, too! Perhaps it would be safest." Then, peering down the vaulted passage and drawing back, "It is a gloomy hole to get married in!"

"You won't say so when you see the chapel itself," he reassured her. "It is rather a beautiful place. Whenever any of my ancestors committed a particularly atrocious raid, and wanted to be absolved for their sins, they put in a window or a painting or carving. The family was Catholic until my grandfather's time, and then High Church, so the glories have remained untouched."

Sabine kept close to him as they walked, as a child afraid of the dark would have done. It seemed to her too like her recent experience of the secret passage, and then she exclaimed in a voice of frank awe and admiration, when he opened the nail-studded, iron-bound door at the end:

"Oh! how divine!"

And it was indeed. A gem of the finest period of early Gothic architecture, adorned with all trophies which love, fear and contrition could compel from the

Digitized by Google

art of the ages. Glorious colored lights swept down in shafts from matchless stained glass, and the high altar was a blaze of richness, while beautiful paintings and tapestries covered the walls.

It was gorgeous and sumptuous, and unlike anything else in England or Scotland. It might have been the private chapel of a proud, voluptuous Cardinal in Rome's great days.

"Why is that one little window plain?" Sabine asked.

Then Michael answered with a cynical note in his voice:

"It is left for me—I, who am the last of them, to put up some expiatory offering, I expect. Rapine and violence are in the blood," and then he laughed lightly, and led her back through the gloom to his sitting-room. There was a strange, fierce light in his bright blue eyes, which the child-woman did not see, and which, if she had perceived, she would not have understood any more than he understood it himself—for no concrete thought had yet come to him about the future. Only, there underneath was that mighty force, relentless, inexorable, of heredity, causing the instinct which had dominated the Arranstouns for eleven hundred years.

He did not seek to detain his guest and promised bride—but, with great courtesy, he showed her the way down the stairs of the lawn, and so through the postern into the park, and he watched her slender form trip off

Digitized by Google

towards the gate which was opposite the Inn, her last words ringing in his ears in answer to his final question.

"No, I shall not fail—I will leave the Crown at nine o'clock exactly on Thursday."

Then turning, he retraced his steps to his sitting-room, and there found Henry Fordyce returned.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

"WELL, old boy!" Mr. Fordyce greeted him with. "You should have been with me and had a good round of golf—but perhaps, though, you have made up your mind!"

Michael flung himself into his great chair.

"Yes—I have—and I have got a fiancée."

Mr. Fordyce was not disturbed; he did not even answer this absurd remark, he just puffed his cigar—cigarettes were beneath his notice.

"You don't seem very interested," his host ejaculated, rather aggrievedly.

"Tommyrot!"

"I tell you, it is true. I have got a fiancée."

"My dear fellow, you are mad!"

"No, I assure you I am quite sane—I have found a way out of the difficulty—an angel has dropped from the clouds to save me from Violet Hatfield."

Henry Fordyce was actually startled. Michael looked as though he were talking seriously.

"But where did she come from? What the— Oh! I have no patience with you, you old fool! You are playing some comedy upon me!"

Digitized by Google

"Henry, I give you my word, I'm not—I am going to marry a most presentable young person at nine o'clock on Thursday night in the chapel here—and you are going to stay and be best man." Then his excitement began to rise again, and he got up from his chair and paced up and down restlessly. "It is the very thing. She wants her money and I want my freedom. She gets hers by marriage, and I get mine. I don't care a rush for domestic bliss, it has never appealed to me; and the fellow in Australia who'll come after me has got a boy who will do all right, no doubt, for the old place by and by. I shall have a perfectly free time and no responsibilities—and, thank the Lord! no more women for me for the future. I have done with the snakes. I shall be happy and free for the first time for a whole year!"

Mr. Fordyce actually let his cigar go out. This incredible story was beginning to have an effect upon him.

"But where did she come from?" he asked blandly, as one speaks to a harmless imbecile. "I leave you here in an abject state of despair, ready almost to decide upon marrying old Bessie, and I return in an hour and you inform me everything is settled, and you are the fiancé of another lady! You know, you surprise me, Michael— 'Pon my word, you do!"

Michael laughed, it was really a huge joke.

"Yes, it is quite true. Well, just as I was going to

Digitized by Google

ring and send James for Bessie to talk it over with her, there was no end of a smash—as you see—and a girl—a tourist—fell through the secret door. I haven't opened it for five years. She was running away from a horrid fellow she was engaged to, it seems, and fled into the passage, and the door shut after her and she could not get out, so she pushed on in here."

"It adds dramatic color to the story, the girl being engaged to someone else—pray go on."

Mr. Fordyce had now picked up his cigar again. This preposterous tale no longer interested him. He thought it even rather bad taste on the part of his friend.

"All right!" Michael explained. "You need not believe me if you don't like. I don't care, since I have done what I wanted to. Bar chaff, Henry, I am telling you the truth. The girl appears to be a young woman of decision. She explained at once her circumstances, and it struck us both that to go through the ceremony of marriage would smooth all our difficulties. We can easily get the bond annulled later on."

Henry Fordyce put down his cigar again.

"I am off to town to-night. You won't mind, will you?" Michael went on. "Just to see if everything is all right, and to get her guardian's consent and a special license, and I shall be back by the six o'clock train on Thursday in time to get the ceremony over that night; and then, by the early morning express, if you'll

Digitized by Google

wait till then, we'll go South together, and so for Paris and freedom!"

Henry actually rose from his chair.

"And the bride?" he asked.

Michael laughed. "Oh, she may go to the moon, for all I care; she leaves directly after the ceremony with her certificate of marriage, which she means to brandish in the face of her relations, who are staying at the Inn, and so exit out of my life! It is only an affair of expediency."

"It is the affair of a madman."

Michael frowned, and his firm chin looked aggressive.

"It is nothing of the kind. You told me yourself that you would rather marry old Bessie—a woman of eighty-four—than Violet Hatfield; and now, when I have found a much more suitable person—a pretty little lady—you begin to talk. My mind is made up, and there is an end of it."

Mr. Fordyce interrupted.

"Bessie would have been much more suitable—a plain pretext; but you have no idea what complications you may be storing up for yourself by marrying a young girl— What is the sense in it?" he continued, a little excited now. "The younger and prettier she is makes her all the more unsuitable to be used merely as a tool in your game. Confound it, Michael!"

"And her game, too," his host reminded him. His

Digitized by Google

eyes were flashing now, and that expression, which all his underlings knew meant he intended to have his own will at any cost, grew upon his face.

"You forget that in Scotland divorce is not an impossibility and—*I am going to do it, Henry.* Now, I had better write to old Fergusson, my chaplain, and tell him to be in readiness, and I suppose I ought to see my lawyers in Edinburgh, although, as there are no settlements and it is just between ourselves, perhaps it does not matter about them."

"How old is the girl?" Mr. Fordyce felt it prudent to ask. "It is a pretty serious thing you contemplate, you know."

"Oh! rot!—she is seventeen, I believe—and for that sort of a marriage and mere business arrangement, her age is no consequence."

Henry turned to the window and looked out for a moment, then he said gravely:

"Is it quite fair to her?"

Michael had gone to his writing-table, and was busily scribbling to his chaplain, but he looked over his shoulder startled, and then a gleam of blue fire came into his eyes, and his handsome mouth shut like a vise.

"Of course, it is quite fair. She wishes to be free as much as I do. She gets what she wants and I get what I want—a mere ceremony can be annulled at any time. She jumped at the idea, I tell you, Henry—I have not got time to go into the pros and cons of that side of

Digitized by Google

the question, and I don't want to hear your views or any one else's on the matter. I mean to marry the girl on Thursday night—and you can quite well put off going South until Friday morning, and see me through it."

Mr. Fordyce prepared to go towards the door, and when there said, in a voice of ice:

"I shall do no such thing. I cannot prevent your doing this, I suppose—taking advantage of a young girl for your own ends, it seems to me—so I shall go now."

Michael's temper began to blaze with this, his oldest friend.

"As you please," he flashed. "But it is perfect rot, all this high palaver. The girl gains by it as well as I. I am not taking the least advantage of her. I shall have to get her guardian's consent, and I suppose he'll know what he is up to. I have never taken any one's advice, and I am not going to begin now, old boy—so we had better say good-bye if you won't stop."

He came over to the door, and then he smiled his radiant, irresistible smile so like a mischievous jolly boy's.

"Give me joy, Henry, old friend," he said, and held out his hand.

But Henry Fordyce looked grave as a judge as he took it.

"I can't do that, Michael. I am very angry with

Digitized by Google

you. I have known you ever since you were born, and we have been real pals, although I am so much older than you—but I'm damned if I'll stay and see you through this folly. Good-bye." And without a word further he went out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Michael gave a sort of whoop to Binko, who sprang at him in love and excitement, while he cried:

"Very well! Get along, old saint!"

Then he rang the bell, and to the footman when he came he handed the note he had written to be taken to Mr. Fergusson, and sent orders for Johnson to pack for two nights, and for his motor to be ready to catch the 10:40 express at the junction for London town. Then he seized his cap and, calling Binko, he went off into the garden, and so on to the park and to the golf house, where, securing his professional, he played a vigorous round, and when he got back to the castle again, just before dinner, he was informed that Mr. Fordyce had left in his own motor for Edinburgh.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

AN opalescence of soft light and peace and beauty was over the park of Arranstoun on this June night of its master's wedding, and he walked among the giant trees to the South Lodge gate, only a few hundred yards from the postern, which he reached from his sitting-room. All had gone well in London. Mr. Parsons had raised no objection, being indeed greatly flattered at the proposed alliance—for who had not heard of the famous border Castle of Arranstoun and envied its possessor?

They had talked a long time and settled everything.

"Tie up the whole of Miss Delburg's money entirely upon herself," Mr. Arranstoun had said—"if it is not already done—then we need not bother about settlements. I understand that she is well provided for."

"And how about your future children?" Mr. Parsons asked.

Michael stiffened suddenly as he looked out of the office window.

"Oh—er, they will naturally have all I possess," he returned quickly.

Digitized by Google

And now as he neared the Lodge gate, and nine o'clock struck, a suppressed excitement was in his veins. For no matter how eventful your life may be, or how accustomed you are to chances and vivid amusements, to be facing a marriage ceremony with a practically unknown young woman has aspects of originality in it calculated to set the pulses in motion.

He had almost forgotten that side of the affair which meant freedom and safety for him from the claws of the Spider—although he had learned upon his return home from London that she had, as Henry Fordyce had predicted that she might, "popped in upon him," having motored over from Ebbsworth, and had left him a letter of surprised, intense displeasure at his unannounced absence.

When five minutes had passed, and there was as yet no sign of his promised bride crossing the road from the Inn, Mr. Arranstoun began to experience an unpleasant impatience. The quarter chimed—his temper rose—had she been playing a trick upon him and never intended at any time to come? He grew furious—and paced the fine turf behind the Lodge, swearing hotly as was his wont when enraged.

Then he saw a little figure wrapped in a gray dust cloak much too big for it advancing cautiously to the gate in the twilight, and he bounded forward to meet her and to open the narrow side-entrance before the

Digitized by Google

Lodge-keeper, Old Bessie, could have time to see who was there.

"At last!" he cried, when they were safely inside and had gone a few paces along the avenue. "I was beginning to think you did not mean to keep your word! I am glad you have come!"

"Why, of course I meant to keep my word. I never break it," Sabine said astonished. "I am longing to be free just like you are, but I had an awful business to get away! I have never been so excited in my life! Their train was late—some breakdown on the branch line—they did not get in until half-past eight, and I dare not be all dressed, but had to pretend to be in bed, covered up, still with the awful headache, when Aunt Jemima bounced in." Then she laughed joyously at the recollection of her escape. "The moment she had gone off to her supper, tucking me up for the night, I jumped up and got on my dress and hat and her dust cloak and then I had to watch my moment, creep down those funny little stairs, and out of the side door—and so across here. You know it was far harder to manage than the last feast Moravia Cloudwater and I gave to the girls the night before she went to Paris! Isn't it fun! I do like having these adventures, don't you?"

"Yes," said Michael, and looked down into her face.

She was extremely pretty, he thought, in the soft dusk of this Northern evening. Her leghorn hat with its wreath of blue forget-me-nots was most becoming

Digitized by Google

"He bounded forward to meet her"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

and her brown hair was ruffled a little by the hat's hasty donning.

"I needn't keep this old cloak on, need I?" she asked. "Nobody can see us here and it is so hot."

He helped her off with it and carried it for her. She looked prettier still now, the slender lines of her childish figure were so exquisite in their promise of beautiful womanhood later on, and the Sunday frock of white foulard was most sweet.

Michael was very silent; it almost made her nervous, but she prattled on.

"This is my best frock," she laughed, "because even though it is only a business arrangement, one couldn't get married in an old blouse, could one?"

"Of course not!" and he strode nearer to her. "I am in evening dress, you see—just like a French bridegroom for those wedding parties in the Bois! so we are both festive—but here we are at the postern door!"

He opened it with his key and they stole across the short lawn and up the balcony steps like two stealthy marauders. Then he turned and held out his hand to her in the blaze of electric light.

"Welcome! Oh! it is good of you to have come!"

She shook hands frankly—it seemed the right thing to do, she felt, since they were going to oblige one another and both gain their desires. Then it struck her for the first time that he was a very handsome young man—quite the Prince Charming of the girls' dreams.

Digitized by Google

A thousand times finer than Moravia's Italian prince with whom for her part she had been horribly disappointed when she had seen his photograph. Only it was too silly to consider this one in that light, since he wasn't really going to be hers—only a means to an end. Oh! the pleasure to be free and rich and to do exactly what she pleased! She had been planning all these days what she would do. She would get back to the Inn not later than ten, and creep quietly up to her room through that side door which was always open into the yard. The weather was so beautiful it would be nothing, even if the Inn people did see her entering—she might have been out for a stroll in the twilight. Then at six in the morning she would creep out again and go to the station; there was a train which left for Edinburgh at half-past—and there she would get a fast express to London later on, after a good breakfast; and once in London a cab would take her to Mr. Parsons', and after that!—money and freedom!

She had planned it all. She would leave a letter for her Uncle and Aunt, saying she was married and had gone and they need not trouble themselves any more about her. Mr. Parsons would tell her where to stay and help her to get a good maid like Moravia had, and then she would go to Paris just as Moravia had done and buy all sorts of lovely clothes; it would take her perhaps a whole month, and then when she was a very grand, grown-up lady, she would write to her dear

Digitized by Google

friend and say now she was ready to accept her invitation to go and stay with her! And what absolute joy to give Moravia such a surprise! to say she was married and free! and had quite as nice things as even that Princess! It was all a simply glorious picture—and but for this kind young man it could never have been hers—but her fate would have been—Samuel Greenbank or Aunt Jemima for four years! It was no wonder she felt grateful to him! and that her handshake was full of cordiality.

Michael pulled himself together rather sharply, the blood was now running very fast in his veins.

"Wait here," he said to her, "while I go into the chapel to see if Mr. Fergusson and the two witnesses are ready."

They were—Johnson and Alexander Armstrong—and the old chaplain who had been Michael's father's tutor and was now an almost doddering old nonentity also stood waiting in his white surplice at the altar rails.

The candles were all lit and great bunches of white lilies gave forth a heavy scent. A strange sense of intoxication rose to Michael's brain. When he returned to his sitting-room he found his bride-to-be arranging her hat at the old mirror which had reflected her before.

"Won't you take it off?" he suggested—"and see, I have got you some flowers——" and he brought her a

Digitized by Google

great bunch of stephanotis which lay waiting upon a table near.

"There is no orange-blossom—because that is for real weddings—but won't you just put this bit of stephanotis in your hair?" and he broke off a few blooms.

She was delighted, she loved dressing up, and she fixed it most becomingly with dexterous fingers above her left ear.

"You do look sweet," he told her. "Now we must come——" and he gave her his arm. She took it with that grave look of a child acting in a very serious grown-up play. She was perfectly delicious with her blooming youth and freshness and dimples—her violet eyes shining like stars, and her red full lips pouting like appetizing ripe cherries. Michael trembled a little as he felt her small hand upon his arm.

They walked to the altar rails and the ceremony began.

But, with the first words of the old clergyman's voice, a new and unknown excitement came over Sabine. The night and the gorgeous chapel and the candles and the flowers all affected her deeply, just as the grand feast days used to do at the convent. A sudden realization of the mystery of things overcame her and frightened her, so that her voice was hardly audible as she repeated the clergyman's words.

What were these vows she was making before God?

Digitized by Google

She dared not think—the whole thing was a maze, a dream. It was too late to run away—but it was terrible—she wanted to scream.

At last she felt her bridegroom place the ring upon her finger, now ice cold.

And then she was conscious that she was listening to these words:

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

After that she must have reeled a little, for she felt a strong arm encircle her waist for a moment.

Then she knew she was kneeling and that words of no meaning whatever were being buzzed over her head.

And lastly she was vividly awakened to burning consciousness by the first man's kiss which had ever touched her innocent lips.

So she was married—and this was her husband, this splendid, beautiful young man there beside her in his evening clothes—and it was over—and she was going away and would never see him again—and what had she done?—and would God be very angry?—since it was all really in a church!

Her hand trembled as she wrote her name, Sabine Delburg, for the last time, and she was shivering all over as she walked back with her newly-made husband to his sitting-room through the gloomy corridor. There it was all brilliant light again, the light of soft silk-shaded lamps—and the center table was cleared

Digitized by Google

and supper for two and opened champagne awaited them. They were both very pale, and Sabine sat down in a chair.

"Mr. Fergusson will bring a copy of the certificate in a minute," Michael said to her, "and then we can have some supper—but now, come, we must drink each other's healths."

He poured out the wine into two glasses and handed her one. She had never tasted champagne before—but sipped it as she was bid. It did not seem to her a very nice drink—not to be compared to *sirop aux fraises*—but she knew at weddings people always had champagne.

Michael gulped down a bumper, and it steadied his nerves and the fresh, vigorously healthy color came back to his face. The whole situation had excited his every sense.

"Let me wish you all joy—Mrs.—Arranstoun!" he said.

The little bride laughed her rippling laugh. This brought her back to earth and the material, jolly side of things, it was so funny to hear herself thus called.

"Oh! that does sound odd!" she cried. "I shall never call myself that—why, people might know I must be something connected with this castle, and they would be questioning, and I couldn't have a scrap of fun! You have got another name—you said it just now, 'Michael Howard Arranstoun'—that will do. I shall

Digitized by Google

be Mrs. Howard! It is quite ordinary—and shall I be a widow? I've never thought of all this yet. Oh! it will be fun."

Every second of the time her charm was further affecting Michael—he was not conscious of any definite intention—only to talk to her—to detain her as long as possible. She was like a breath of exquisite spring air after Violet Hatfield.

Mr. Fergusson here came in from the chapel with the certificate—and his presence seemed a great bore, and after thanking him for his services, Michael poured him out some wine to drink their healths, and then the butler announced that the brougham was waiting at the door to take the old gentleman home.

Sabine had stood up on his entrance and came forward to wish him good-bye; now that the certificate was there she intended to go herself by the balcony steps as soon as he should be safely off by the door.

"Good-bye, my dear young lady, I have known your husband since he was born, and with all his faults he is a splendid fellow; let me wish you every happiness and prosperity together and may you be blessed with many children and peace."

Sabine stiffened—she felt she ought to enlighten the benevolent old man, who evidently did not understand at all that she was going to trip off—not as he, just to her own home, but out of Mr. Arranstoun's life forever—but no suitable words would come, and Michael,

Digitized by Google

afraid of what she might say, hurried his chaplain off without more ado and then returned to her and shut the door.

Now they were absolutely alone and the clock struck ten in the courtyard with measured strokes.

"Let us begin supper," he said, with what calmness he could.

"But I ought to go back at once," his bride protested; "the Inn may be shut and then what in the world should I do?"

"There is plenty of time, it certainly won't close its doors until eleven—have some soup—or a cold quail and some salad—and see, I have not forgotten the wedding-cake—you must cut that!"

Sabine was very hungry; she had had to pretend her head was aching too much to go with her elders to the ruins of Elbank and had retired to her room before they left, and had had no tea, and such dainties were not to be resisted, especially the cake! After all, it could not be any harm staying just this little while longer since no one would ever know, and people who got married always did cut their own cakes. So she sat down and began, he taking every care of her. They had the merriest supper, and even the champagne, more of which he gave her, did not taste so nasty after the first sip.

She had quail and salad and a wonderful ice—better than any, even on the day of the holiday for Moravia's

Digitized by Google

wedding far away in Rome; and there were marrons glacés, too, and other divine bon-bons—and strawberries and cream!

She had never enjoyed herself so much in her whole life. Her perfectly innocent prattle enchanted Michael more and more with its touches of shrewd common sense. He drank a good deal of champagne, too—and finally, when it came to cutting the cake time, a wild thought began to enter his head.

The icing was rather hard, and he had to help her—and stood beside her, very near.

She looked up smilingly and saw something in his face. It caused her a sudden wild emotion of she knew not what—and then she felt very nervous and full of fear.

She moved abruptly away from him to the other side of the table, leaving the cake—and stood looking at him with great, troubled, violet eyes.

He followed her.

"You little, sweet darling!" he whispered, his voice very deep. "Why should you ever go away from me—I want to teach you to love me, Sabine. You belong to me, you know—you are mine. I shall not let you leave me! I shall keep you and hold you close!"

And he clasped her in his arms.

For he was a man, you see—and the moment had come!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

FIVE YEARS AFTERWARDS

MR. ELIAS CLOUDWATER came up the steps of the Savoy Hotel at Carlsbad, and called to the Arab who was waiting about:

"Has the Princess come in from her drive yet?"

He was informed that she had not, and he sat down in the verandah to wait. He was both an American gentleman and an American father, therefore he was accustomed to waiting for his women folk and did not fidget. He read the *New York Herald*, and when he had devoured the share list, he glanced at the society news and read that, among others who were expected at the Bohemian health resort that day, was Lord Fordyce, motoring, for a stay of three weeks for the cure.

He did not know this gentleman personally, and the fact would not have arrested his attention at all only that he chanced to be interested in English politics. He wondered vaguely if he would be an agreeable acquisition to the place, and then turned to more thrilling things. Presently a slender young woman came down the path through the woods and leisurely entered the

Digitized by Google

gate. Mr. Cloudwater watched her, and a kindly smile lit his face. He thought how pretty she was, and how glad he was that she had joined Moravia and himself again this summer. The months when she went off by herself to her house in Brittany always seemed very long. He saw her coming from far enough to be able to take in every detail about her. Extreme slenderness and extreme grace were her distinctive marks. The face was childish and rounded in outline, but when you looked into the violet eyes there was some shadow of a story hidden there. She was about twenty-two years old, and was certainly not at Carlsbad for any reasons of cure, for her glowing complexion told a tale of radiant health.

Her white clothes were absolutely perfect in their simplicity, and so was her air of unconcern and indifference. "The enigma" her friends often called her. She seemed so frank and simple, and no one ever got beyond the wall of what she was really thinking—what did she do with her life? It seemed ridiculous that any one so rich and attractive and young should care to pass long periods of time at a wild spot near Finisterre, in an old château perched upon the rocks, completely alone but for an elderly female companion.

There was, of course, some hidden tragedy about her husband—who was a raging lunatic or an inebriate shut up somewhere—perhaps there! They had had to part at once—he had gone mad on the wedding journey,

Digitized by Google

some believed, but others said this was not at all the case, and that she had married an Indian chief and then parted from him immediately in America—finding out the horror of being wedded to a savage. No one knew anything for a fact, only that when she did come into the civilized world, it was always with the Princess Torniloni and her father, who, if they knew the truth of Mrs. Howard's story, never gave it away. Men swarmed around her, but she appeared completely unconcerned and friendly with them all, and not even the most envious of the other Americans who were trying to climb into Princess Torniloni's exclusive society had ever been able to make up any scandals about her.

"I have had such an enchanting walk, Clowdy, dear," the slim young woman said as she sat down in a basket-chair near Mr. Cloudwater. "I am so glad we came here, aren't you?—and I am sure it will do Moravia no end of good. She passed me as I was coming from the Aberg on her way to Hans Heiling, so she will not be in yet. Let us have tea."

The Arab called the waiter, who brought it to them. One or two other little groups were having some, too, but Mr. Cloudwater's party were singularly ungregarious, and avoided making acquaintances in hotels. He and Mrs. Howard chatted alone together over theirs for about half an hour. Presently there was the noise of a motor arriving. It whirled into the gate and stopped where they usually do, a little at one side. It

Digitized by Google

was very dusty and travel-stained, and beside the chauffeur there got out a tall, fair Englishman. The personnel of the hotel came forward to meet him with empressement, and as he passed where Mr. Cloudwater and Mrs. Howard were sitting, they heard him say:

"My servant brought the luggage by train this morning, so I suppose the rooms are ready."

"They are a wonderful race," Mr. Cloudwater remarked, "aren't they, Sabine. I never can understand why you should so persistently avoid them—they really have much more in common with ourselves than Latins."

"That is why perhaps—one likes contrasts—and French and Russians, or Germans, are far more intelligent. Every one to his taste!" and Mrs. Howard smiled.

The Englishman came out again in a few minutes, and sitting down lazily, as though he were alone upon the balcony terrace, he ordered some tea. Not the remotest scrap of interest in his surroundings or companions lit up his face. He might have been forty or forty-two, perhaps, but being so fair he looked a good deal younger, and had a peculiar distinction of his own.

"That is what I object to about them," Mrs. Howard remarked presently, "their abominable arrogance. Look at that man. It is just as though there was no one else on this balcony but himself—no one else exists for him!"

"Why, Sabine, you are severe! He looks to me to

Digitized by Google

be a pretty considerably nice man—and he is only reading the paper as I have been doing myself," Mr. Cloudwater rejoined. "Perhaps he is the English nobleman who I read was expected to-day—Lord Fordyce, the paper said—and wasn't that the name of rather a prominent English politician who had to go into the Upper House last year when his father died—and it was considered he would be a loss to the Commons?"

"I really don't know. I don't take the slightest interest in them or their politics. Ah! here is Moravia——" and both rose to meet a very charming lady who drove up in a victoria and got out.

She had all the perfection of detail which characterizes the very best-dressed American woman—and she had every attraction except, perhaps, a voice—but even that she knew how to modulate and disguise, so that it was no wonder that the Princess Torniloni passed for one of the most beautiful women in Rome or Paris, or Cairo or New York, whenever she graced any of the cities with her presence. She was a widow, too, and very rich. The Prince, her husband, had been dead for nearly two years, and she was wearing grays and whites and mauves.

He had been a brute, too, but unlike her friend, Mrs. Howard's husband, he had had the good taste to be killed riding in a steeplechase, and so all went well, and the pretty Princess was free to wander the world over with her indulgent father.

Digitized by Google

"It is just too lovely for words up in those woods, papa," she said, "and I have had my tea in a dear little châlet restaurant. You did not wait for me, I hope?"

They assured her they had not done so, and she sat down in a comfortable chair. Her arrival caused a flutter among the other occupants of the terrace, and even the Englishman glanced up. This group had at last made some impression it would seem upon the retina of his eye, for he looked deliberately at them and realized that the two women were quite worthy of his scrutiny.

"But I hate Americans," he said to himself. "They are such actresses, you never know where you are with them—these two, though, appear some of the best."

Presently they went into the hotel, passing him very closely— and for a second his eyes met the violet ones of Sabine Howard, and he was conscious that he felt distinctly interested, much to his disgust.

But, after all, he was here for a cure and a rest, and he had always believed in women as recreations.

His solitary table was near theirs in the restaurant, and later he wrote to his friend, Michael Arranstoun, loitering at Ostende:

> The hotel is quite decent—and after your long sojourn in the wilds, you will have an overdose of polo and expensive ladies and baccarat. You had much better join me here at the end of the week. There are two pretty women who would be quite your affair. They have the next table, and neither of them can be taking the cure.

Digitized by Google

But Mr. Arranstoun, when he received this missive, had other things to do. He had been out of England, and indeed Europe, for nearly five years—having, in the summer of 1907, joined a friend to explore the innermost borders of China and Tibet, and there the passion for this kind of thing had overtaken him, and his own home knew him no more.

Now, however, he had announced that he had returned for good, and intended to spend the rest of his days at Arranstoun as a model landlord.

He started this by playing polo at Ostende, where he had run across Henry Fordyce. They had cordially grasped each other's hands, their estrangement forgotten when face to face; and the only mention there had been of the circumstances which had caused their parting were in a few sentences.

"By Jove, Henry, it is five whole years since you thundered morals at me and shook the dust of Arranstoun from your feet!"

"You did behave abominably, Michael—but I am awfully glad to see you—and the scene at Ebbsworth, when Violet Hatfield read the notice in the *Scotsman* of your marriage, made me feel you had been almost justified in taking any course you could to make yourself safe. But how about your wife? Have you ever seen her again?"

"No. My lawyer tells me I can divorce her now for desertion. I should have to make some pretence of

Digitized by Google

"His solitary table was near theirs in the restaurant"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

asking her to return to me, he says, which of course she would refuse to do—and then both can be free, but, for my part, I am not hankering after freedom much—I do very well as I am—and I always cherish a rather tender recollection of her."

Henry laughed.

"I have often pictured that wedding," he said, "and the little bride going off with her certificate and your name all alone. No family turned up awkwardly at the last moment to mar things; she left safely after the ceremony, eh?"

Michael looked away suddenly, and then answered with overdone unconcern:

"Yes—soon after the ceremony."

"I do wonder you had no curiosity to investigate her character further!"

"I had—but she did not appreciate my interest—and—after she had gone—I was rather in a bad temper, and I reasoned myself into believing she was probably right—also just then I wanted to join Latimer Berkeley's expedition to China. I remember, his letter about it came by the next morning's post—so I went—but do you know, Henry, I believe that little girl made some lasting impression upon me. I believe, if she had stayed, I should have been frantically in love with her—but she went, so there it is!"

"Why don't you try to find her?" Henry asked.

"Perhaps I mean to some day. I have thought of

Digitized by Google

doing so often, but first China, and then one thing and another have stopped me—besides, she may have fancied some other fellow by this time—the whole thing was one of those colossal mistakes. If we could only have met ordinarily—and not married in a hurry and then parted—like that."

"Has it never struck you she was rather young to be left to drift by herself?"

"Yes, often—" Then Michael grew a little constrained. "I believe I behaved like the most impossible brute, Henry—in marrying her at all as you said—but I would like to make it up to her some day—and I suppose if, by chance, she has taken a fancy to someone else by this time and wants to be free of me, I ought to divorce her—but, by Heaven, I believe I should hate that!"

"You dog in the manger!"

"Yes, I am——"

And so the subject had ended.

And now Henry, third Lord Fordyce, was taking a mild cure at Carlsbad, and had decided that in his leisure moments he would begin to write a book—a project which had long simmered in his brain; but after two days of sitting by the American party at each meal, a very strong desire to converse with them—especially the one with the strange violet eyes—overcame him; and with deliberate intention he scraped acquaintance with Mr. Cloudwater in the exercise room of the

Digitized by Google

Kaiserbad, who, with polite ceremony, presented him that evening to his daughter and her friend.

Sabine had been particularly silent and irritating, Moravia thought, and as they went up to bed she scolded her about it.

"He is a perfect darling, Sabine," she declared, "and will do splendidly to take walks with us and make the fourth. He is so lazy and English and phlegmatic—I'd like to make him crazy with love—but he looked at you, you little witch, not at me at all."

"You are welcome to him, Morri—I don't care for Englishmen. Good-night, pet," and Mrs. Howard kissed her friend, and going in to her room, she shut the door.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

MORE than a week went by, and it seemed quite natural now to Lord Fordyce to shape his days according to the plans of the American party, and when they met at the Schlossbrunn in the morning at half-past seven, and he and Mr. Cloudwater and the Princess had drunk their tumblers of water together, their custom was to go on down to the town and there find Sabine, who had bought their slices of ham and their rolls, and awaited them at the end of the Alte Weise with the pink paper bags, and then the four proceeded to walk to the Kaiser Park to breakfast.

This meal was so merry, Mrs. Howard tantalizing the others by having cream in her coffee and sugar upon her wild strawberries, while they were only permitted to take theirs plain.

During the stroll there it was Sabine's custom persistently to adhere to the side of Mr. Cloudwater, leaving the other two tête-à-tête—and, delightful as Lord Fordyce found the Princess, this irritated him. He discovered himself, as the days advanced, to be experi-

Digitized by Google

encing a distinct longing to know what was passing in that little head, whose violet eyes looked out with so much mystery and shadow in their depths. He could not tell himself that she avoided him; she was always friendly and casual and perfectly at her ease, but no extra look of pleasure or welcome for him personally ever came into her face, and never once had he been able to speak to her really alone. Mr. Cloudwater and the two ladies drove back from breakfast each day, and he was left to take his exercises and his bath. Now and then he had encountered the Princess in the near woods just before luncheon, returning from the Kaiserbad, but Mrs. Howard never—and when he inquired how she spent her time, she replied however she happened to fancy, which gave him no clue as to where he might find her—and with all her frank charm, she was not a person to whom it was easy to put a direct question. Lord Fordyce began to grow too interested for his peace of mind. When he realized this, he got very angry with himself. He had never permitted a woman to be anything but a mild recreation in his life, and at forty it was a little late to begin to experience something serious about one.

They often motored in the afternoon to various resorts not too far distant, and there took tea; and for two whole days it had been wet and, except at meals, the ladies had lain *perdues*.

However fate was kind on a Saturday morning, and

Digitized by Google

allowed Lord Fordyce to chance upon Mrs. Howard, right up at the Belvedere in the far woods, looking over the valley. She was quite alone, and her slender figure was outlined against the bright sunlight as she leaned on the balustrade gazing down at the exquisite scene.

Henry could have cried aloud in joy, "At last!" but he restrained himself, and instead only said a casual "Hullo!" Mrs. Howard turned and looked at him, and answered his greeting with frank cordiality.

"Have you never been here before? I think it is one of the most lovely spots in the whole woods, and at this time there is never any one—what made you penetrate so far?"

"Good fortune! The jade has been unkind until now."

They leant on the balustrade together.

"I always like being up on a high mountain and looking down at things, don't you?" she said.

"No, not always—one feels lonely—but it is nice if one is with a suitable companion. How have you, at your age, managed to become self-sufficing?"

"Circumstance, I expect, has taught me the beauty of solitude. I spend months alone in Brittany."

"And what do you do—read most of the time?"

He was so enchanted that she was not turning the conversation into banal things, he determined not to say

Digitized by Google

anything which would cause her again to draw down the blind of bland politeness.

"Yes, I read a great deal. You see, Moravia and I were at a convent together, and there, beyond teaching us to spell and to write and do a few sums and learn a garbled version of French history, a little music, and a great deal of embroidery, they left us totally ignorant—one must try to supply the deficiencies oneself. It is appalling to remain ignorant once one realizes that one is."

"Knowledge on any subject is interesting—did you begin generally—or did you specialize?"

"I always wanted to be just—and to understand things. The whole of life and existence seemed too difficult—I think I began trying to find some key to that and this opened the door to general information, and so eventually, perhaps, one specializes."

He was wise enough not to press the question into what her specializing ran. He adored subtleties, and he noted with delight that she was not so completely indifferent as usual. If he could keep her attention for a little while, they might have a really interesting investigation of each other's thoughts.

"I like thinking of things, too—and trying to discover their meanings and what caused them. We are all, of course, the victims of heredity."

"That may be," she agreed, "but the will can control any heredity. It can only manifest itself when we let

Digitized by Google

ourselves drift. The tragedy of it is that we have drifted too far sometimes before we learn that we could have directed the course if we had willed. Ignorance is seemingly the most cruel foe we have to encounter, because we are so defenseless, not knowing he is there."

She sighed unconsciously and looked out over the beautiful tree-tops, down to where the Kaiser Park appeared like a little doll's châlet set among streams and pastures green.

Lord Fordyce was much moved. She was prettier and sweeter than he had even fancied she would be could he ever contrive to find her all alone. He watched her covertly; the exquisite peachy skin with its pure color, and her soft brown hair dressed with a simplicity which he thought perfection, all appealed to him, and those strange violet eyes rather round and heavily lashed with brown-shaded lashes, darker at the tips. The type was not intense or of a studious mould. Circumstance must indeed have formed an exotic character to have grafted such deep meaning in their innocent depths. She went on presently, not remarking his silence.

"It is heredity which makes my country women so nervous and unstable as a rule. You don't like them, as I know," and she smiled, "and I think, from your point of view, you are right. You see, we are nearly all mushroom growths, sprung up in a night—and we have not had time for poise, or the acceptance with

Digitized by Google

calmness of our good fortune. We are as yet unbalanced by it, and don't know what we want."

"You are very charming," and he looked truthful, and at that moment felt so.

"Yes, I know—we can be more charming than any other women because we have learnt from all the other nations and play which ever part we wish to select."

"Yes," he admitted, rather too quickly—and her rippling laugh rang out. He had hardly ever heard her laugh, and it enchanted him, even though he was nettled at her understanding of his thought.

"It remains for men to make us desire to play the same part always—if they find it agreeable."

Again he said "Yes"—but this time slowly.

"Now you Englishmen have the heredity of absolute phlegm to fight. While we ought to be trying to counteract jumping from one rôle to another, you ought to try to teach yourselves that versatility is a good thing, too, in its way."

"I am sure it is. I wish you would teach me to understand it—but you yourself seem to be restful and stable. How have you achieved this?"

"By studying the meaning of things, I suppose, and checking myself every time I began to want to do the restless things I saw my countrywomen doing. We have wonderful wills, you know, and if we want a thing sufficiently, we can get anything. That is why Moravia says we make such successful great ladies in the dif-

Digitized by Google

ferent countries we marry into. Your great ladies, if they are nice, are great naturally, and if they are not, they often fail, even if they are born aristocrats. We do not often fail, because we know very well we are taking on a part, and must play it to the very best of our ability all the time—and gradually we play it better than if it were natural."

"What a little cynic! 'Out of the mouths of babes'!" and he laughed.

"I am not at all a cynic! It is the truth I am telling you. I admire and respect our methods far more than yours, which just 'growed' like Topsy!"

"But cynicism and truth are, unfortunately, synonymous. Only you are too young, and ought not to know anything about either!"

"I like to know and do things I ought not to!" Her eyes were merry.

"Tell me some more about your countrywomen. I'm awfully interested, and have always been too frightened of their brilliancy to investigate myself."

"We are not nearly so bothered with hearts as Europeans—heredity again. Our mothers and fathers generally sprang from people working too hard to have great emotions—then we arrive, and have every luxury poured upon us from birth; and if we have hardy characters we weather the deluge and remain very decent citizens."

"And if you have not?"

Digitized by Google

"Why, naturally the instincts for hard work, which made our parents succeed, if they remain idle must make some explosion. So we grow restless in our palaces, and get fads and nerves and quaint diseases—and have to come to Carlsbad—and talk to sober Englishmen!" The look of mischief which she vouchsafed him was perfectly adorable. He was duly affected.

"You take us as a sort of cure!"

"Yes——!"

"How do you know so much about us and our faults? I gathered, from what you said last night at dinner, that you have never been in England but once, for a month, when you were almost a child."

"The rarest specimens come abroad," and a dimple showed in her left cheek, "and I read about you in your best novels—even your authors unconsciously give you away and show your selfishness and arrogance and self-satisfaction."

"Shocking brutes, aren't we?"

"Perfectly."

Then they both laughed, and Sabine suggested it was time they returned to luncheon.

"It is quite two miles from here, and Mr. Cloudwater, although the kindest dear old gentleman, begins to get hungry at one o'clock.

So they turned and sauntered downwards through the lovely green woods, with the warm hum of insects and the soft summer, glancing sunshine. And all of

Digitized by Google

you who know the beauties of Carlsbad, or indeed any other of those Bohemian spas, can just picture how agreeable was their walk, and how conducive to amiable discussion and the acceleration of friendship. Henry tried to get her to tell him some more of the secrets of her countrywomen, but she would not be serious. She was in a merry mood, and turned the fire into the enemy's camp, making him disclose the ways of Englishmen.

"I believe you like us as a rule because we are such casual creatures!" he said at last, "rather indifferent about *petits soins*, and apt to seize what we desire, or take it for granted."

A sudden shadow came into her face which puzzled him, and she did not answer, but went on to talk of Brittany and the place which she had bought. Héronac —just a weird castle perched right upon a rock above a fishing village, with the sea dashing at its base and the spray rising right to her sitting-room windows.

"I have to go across a causeway to my garden upon the main land—and when it is very rough, I get soaking wet—it is the wildest place you ever saw."

"What on earth made you select it?" Lord Fordyce asked. "You, who look like a fresh rose, to choose a grim brigand's stronghold as a residence!"

"It suited my mood on the day I first saw it—and I bought it the following week. I make up my mind in a minute as to what I want."

Digitized by Google

"You must let me motor past and look at it," he pleaded, "and when my twenty-one days of drinking this uninteresting water is up, I intend going back in my car to Paris, and from there down to see Mont St. Michel."

"You shall not only look at it—you may even come in—if you are nice and do not bore me between now and then," and she glanced up at him slyly. "I have an old companion, Madame Imogen Aubert—who lives with me there—and she always hopes I shall one day have visitors!"

Lord Fordyce promised he would be a pure sage, and if she would put him on probation, and really take pains to sample his capabilities of not boring in a few more walks, he would come up for judgment at Héronac when it was her good pleasure to name a date.

"I shall be there toward the middle of August. After we leave here, the Princess and dear Cloudie go to Italy with her little son, the baby Torniloni; he is such a darling, nearly three years old—he is at Héronac now with his nurses."

"And you go back to Brittany alone?"

"Yes——"

"Then I shall come, too."

"If, at the end of your cure, you have not bored me!"

By this time they had got down to the Savoy gate—and there found Moravia and Mr. Cloudwater waiting for them on the balcony—clamoring for lunch.

Digitized by Google

Princess Torniloni gave a swift, keen glance at the two who had entered, but she did not express the thought which came to her.

"It is rather hard that Sabine, who does not want him and is not free to have him, should have drawn him instead of me."

That night in the restaurant there came in and joined their party one of those American men who are always to be met with in Paris or Aix or Carlsbad or Monte Carlo, at whatever in any of these places represents the Ritz Hotel, one who knew everybody and everything, a person of no particular sex, but who always would make a party go with his stories and his gaiety, and help along any hostess. Cranley Beaton was this one's name. The Cloudwater party were all quite glad to welcome him and hear news of their friends. One or two decent people had arrived that afternoon also, and Moravia felt she could be quite amused and wear her pretty clothes. Sabine hated the avalanches of dinners and lunches and what not this would mean. Her sense of humor was very highly developed, and she often laughed in a fond way over her friend, who was, in her search for pleasure, still as keen as she had been in convent days.

"You do remain so young, Morri!" she told her, as they linked arms going up to bed. Their rooms were on the first floor, and they disdained the lift. "Do you remember, you used to be the mother to all of

Digitized by Google

us at St. Anne's—and now I am the mother of us two!"

"You are an old, wise-headed Sibyl—that is what you are, darling!" the Princess returned. "I wish I could ever know what has so utterly changed you from our convent days," and she sighed impatiently. "Then you were the merriest madcap, ready to tease any one and to have any lark, and for nearly these four years since we have been together again you have been another person—grave and self-possessed. What are you always thinking of, Sabine?"

They had reached their sitting-room, and Mrs. Howard went to the window and opened it wide.

"I grew up in one year, Moravia—I grew a hundred years old, and all the studies which I indulge in at Héronac teach me that peace and poise are the things to aim at. I cannot tell you any more."

"I did not mean to probe into your secrets, darling," the Princess exclaimed hastily. "I promised you I never would when you came to me that November in Rome—we were both miserable enough, goodness knows! We made the bargain that there should be no retrospects. And your angelic goodness to me all that time when my little Girolamo was born, have made me your eternal debtor. Why, but for you, darling, he might have been snatched from me by the hateful Torniloni family!"

"The sweet cherub!"

Digitized by Google

Then their conversation turned to this absorbing topic, the perfections of Girolamo! and as it is hardly one which could interest you or me, my friend, let us go back to the smoking-room and listen to a conversation going on between Cranley Beaton and Lord Fordyce. The latter, with great skill, had begun to elicit certain information he desired from this society register!

"Yes, indeed," Mr. Beaton was saying. "She is a peach—The husband"—and he looked extremely wise. "Oh! she made some frightful mésalliance out West, and they say he's shut in a mad-house or home for inebriates. Her entrance among us dates from when she first appeared in Paris, about three years ago, with Princess Torniloni. She is awfully rich and awfully good, and it is a real pity she does not divorce the ruffian and begin again!"

"She is not free, then?" and Lord Fordyce felt his heart sink. "I thought, probably, she had got rid of any encumbrance, as it is fairly easy over with you."

"Why, she could in a moment if she wanted to, I expect," Mr. Beaton assured his listener. "She hasn't fancied anyone else yet; when she does, she will, no doubt."

"Her husband is an American, then?"

"Why, of course—didn't I tell you she came from the West? Why, I remember crossing with her. She was in deep mourning—in the summer of 1908. She never spoke to anyone on board, and it was about

Digitized by Google

eighteen months after that I was presented to her in Paris. She gets prettier every day."

Lord Fordyce felt this was true.

"So she could be free if she fancied anyone, you think?" he hazarded casually, as though his interest in the subject had waned—and when Mr. Beaton had answered, "Yes—rather," Lord Fordyce got up and sauntered off toward bed.

"One has to be up so early in the morning, here," he remarked agreeably. "See you to-morrow at the Schlossbrunn?—Good-night!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

AFTER this, for several days Mrs. Howard made it rather difficult for Lord Fordyce to speak to her alone, although he saw her every day, and at every meal, and each hour grew more enamored. She, for her part, was certainly growing to like him. He soothed her; his intelligence was highly trained, and he was courteous and gentle and sympathetic—but for some reason which she could not explain, she had no wish to precipitate matters. Her mind was quite without any definite desire or determination, but, being a woman, she was perfectly aware that Henry was falling in love with her. A number of other men had done so before, and had then at once begun to be uninteresting in her eyes. It was as if she were numb to the attraction of men—but this one had qualities which appealed to her. Her own countrymen were never cultivated enough in literature, and were too absorbed in stocks and shares to be able to take flights of sentiment and imagination with her. Lord Fordyce understood in a second—and they could discuss any subject with a refined subtlety which enchanted her.

Digitized by Google

Henry had not spent his life maneuvring love affairs with women, and was not very clever at manipulating circumstance. He fretted and fumed at not getting his desired tête-à-tête, but with all the will was too hedged in by conventionality and a sense of politeness to force matters, as his friend, Michael Arranstoun, would have done with high-handed unconcern. Thus, his cure at Carlsbad was drawing to a close before he again spent an afternoon quite alone with Sabine Howard. They had gone to the Aberg to tea, and the Princess had expressed herself too tired to walk back, and had got into the waiting carriage, making Cranley Beaton accompany her. She was not in a perfectly amiable temper. Lord Fordyce attracted her strongly, and it was plain to be seen he had only eyes for Sabine—who cared for him not at all. The Princess found Cranley Beaton absolutely tiresome—no better than the *New York Herald*, she thought pettishly, or the *Continental Daily Mail*—to be with! The waters were getting on her nerves, too; she would be glad to leave and go to Sorrento with that Cupid among infants, Girolamo. Sabine had better divorce her horror of a husband, and marry the man and have done with it!

Now the walk from the Aberg down through the woods is a peculiarly delightful one and, even in the season at Carlsbad, not over-crowded by people. Henry Fordyce felt duly elated at the prospect, and

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Howard had an air of pensive mischief in her violet eyes. Lord Fordyce, who had been accustomed for years to making speeches for his party, and was known as a ready orator, found himself rather silent, and even a little nervous, for the first hundred yards or so. She looked so bewitching, he thought, in her fresh white linen, showing up the round peachiness of her young cheeks, and those curling, childish, brown lashes making their shadow. He was overcome with a desire to kiss her. She was so supremely healthy and delectable. He felt he had been altogether a fool in his estimate of the serious necessities of life hitherto. Woman was now one of them—and this woman supremely so. Why, if she could be freed from bonds, should she not become his wife? But he felt it might be wiser not to be too precipitate about suggesting the thing to her. She had certainly given him no indication that she would receive the idea favorably, and appeared to be of the type of character which could not be coerced. He felt very glad Michael Arranstoun had not responded to his pressing request to join him. It would be far better that that irritatingly attractive specimen of manhood should not step upon the scene, until he himself had some definite hope of affairs being satisfactorily settled.

They began their talk upon the lightest subjects, and gradually drifted into one of the discussions of emotions in the abstract which are so fascinating—and

Digitized by Google

so dangerous—and which require skill to direct and continue.

Mrs. Howard held that pleasure could alone come from harmony of body and spirit, while Lord Fordyce maintained that wild discords could also produce it, and that it could not be defined as governed by any law.

"One is sometimes full of pleasure even against one's will," he said. "Every spiritual principle and conviction may be outraged, and yet for some unaccountable reason pleasure remains."

Mrs. Howard opened her eyes wide as if at a sudden thought.

"Yes," she said. "I wish it were not true what you say, but it is—and it is a great injustice."

"What makes you say that?" Henry asked, quickly. "You were thinking of some particular thing. Do tell me."

"I was thinking how some people can sin and err in every way, and yet there is something about them which causes them to be forgiven, and which even causes pleasure while they are sinning; and there are others who might do the same things and would be anathematised at once—and no joy felt with them at any time. Moravia and I call it having 'it'—some people have it, and some people have not got it, and that is the end of the matter!"

"It is a strange thing, but I know what you mean.

Digitized by Google

I know one particular case of it in a friend of mine. No matter what he does, one always forgives him. It does not depend upon looks, either—although this actual person is abominably good-looking—it does not depend upon intelligence or character or—anything—as you say, it is just 'it.' Now you have it, and the Princess, perfectly charming though she is, has not."

Sabine did not contradict him; she never was conventional, denying truths for the sake of diffidence or politeness. Moravia was beautiful and charming, but it was true she had not 'it.'

"I think it applies more to men than to women," was all she said.

"You were thinking of a man, then, when you spoke?"

"Yes—I was thinking of a man—but it is not an interesting subject."

Lord Fordyce decided that it was, but he did not continue it.

"I want you to tell me all about Héronac," he requested, "and what charmed you in it enough to make you buy it suddenly like that. How did you come upon it?"

"I had just arrived from America, at the end of July of 1908—four years ago—and I found, when I got to Cherbourg, that I could not join my friend, the Princess, as I had intended, because her husband had taken

Digitized by Google

her off to his country place near Naples. So I hired a motor and wandered down into Brittany alone. I wanted to be alone. I was motoring along, when a violent storm came on, furious rain and wind, and just at the worst and weirdest moment, I passed Héronac, which is a few hundred yards from the edge of the present village. It stands out in the sea on a great spur of rock, entirely separated from the main land by a deep chasm about thirty feet wide, over which there was then a broken bridge which had once been a drawbridge. It was a huge, grim ruin with only a few roofed rooms, built in about the thirteenth century originally, and of course added to and modernized. The house actually standing within the great towers is of the date of Louis XIV. It stood there, a dark mass, defying the storm, although the huge waves splashed right up to the windows."

"It sounds repellent."

"It was—fierce and grim and repellent, and it suited my mood—so I stopped at the Inn, my old maid Simone and I, and I got permission to go and see it. The landlord of the Inn had the keys. The last of the Héronacs drank himself to death with absinthe in Paris, so the place was closed, and was no doubt for sale. *'Mais oui!'* he told us. Simone was terrified to cross the wretched bridge, with the water swirling beneath, and we left her to go back to the Inn, while the landlord's son came with me. It was about four

Digitized by Google

o'clock in the afternoon, and was a most extraordinary day, for now it began to thunder and lighten."

"I wonder you were not afraid."

"I am never afraid—I tell you, it suited me. There was still some furniture in the roofed part of the inner court, and in the two great towers which flank the main building—but in that the roof was off, but the view from the windows when we crept along to them across the broken floor was too superb, straight out to the ocean, the waves thundering at the base. "I made up my mind that night I would buy it if I could—and, as I told you before, I did so in the following week."

"How quaint of you!"

"It has been the greatest delight to me, and, as you will see, I have done something with it. I restored the center, and have made its arrangements modern and comfortable, but have left that one huge room on the first floor as it was, only with the roof mended. I spend hours and hours in the deep window embrasures looking right over the sea. It has taught me more of the meaning of things than all my books."

"You speak as though you were an old woman," Lord Fordyce exclaimed, "and you look only a mere child now—then, when you bought this brigand's stronghold, you must have been in the nursery!"

"I was over eighteen!"

"A colossal age! it was simply ridiculous for you to be wanting dark castles and solitude. What—?"

Digitized by Google

and then he paused; he did not continue his question.

"I was really very old—I had been old for almost a year."

"And do you mean to remain old always, or will you ever let anyone teach you to be young?"

Sabine looked away into the somber fir trees. They had got to a part of the path where the woods on either side are black as night in their depths.

"I—don't—know," she said, very low.

Lord Fordyce moved nearer to her.

"I wish you would let me try to take away all those somber thoughts I see sometimes in those sweet eyes."

"How would you begin?"

"By loving you very much—and then by trying to make you love me."

"Does love take away dark thoughts, then—or does it bring them?"

"That depends upon the love," he told her, eagerly. "When it is great enough to be unselfish, it must bring peace and happiness, surely——"

"They are good things—they are harmony—but——"

"Yes—what are the buts?" his voice trembled a little.

"Love seems to me to be a wild thing, a raging, tearing passion— Can it ever be just tender and kind?"

"I wish you would let me prove to you that it can."

She looked into his face gravely, and there was nothing but honest question in her violet eyes.

Digitized by Google

"To what end?" she asked.

"I would like you to marry me." He had said it now when he had not intended to yet, and he was pale as death.

She shrank from him a little.

"But surely you know that I am not free!"

"I hoped I—believed that you can make yourself so—if you knew how I love you! I have never really loved any woman before in my life. I always thought they should be only recreations—but the moment I saw you, my whole opinions changed."

She grew troubled.

"I wish you had not said this to me," she faltered. "I—do not know that I wish to change my life. I could, of course, be free, I suppose—if I wanted to be—but—I am not sure. What would it mean if I listened to you? Tell me! I am sometimes very lonely—and I like you so much."

"I want to make you feel more than that, but I will be content with whatever you will give me. I do not care one atom what dark page is in your past, I know it can have been nothing of your own fault, and if it were, I should not care—I only care for you—Sabine—will you not tell me that you will try to let me make you happy. It would mean that, that I should devote my whole life to making you happy."

"A woman should be contented with that, surely," she said. And if Henry Fordyce had had his usual

Digitized by Google

critical wits about him unclouded by love, he would have smiled his cynical smile and have said to himself:

"The spark is not lit, my friend; her voice lacks enthusiasm and her brows are calm," but he was like all lovers—blind—and only saw and heard what could comfort his heart, and so caught at the straw with delight.

"Whatever you asked I would give you. Only say that you will let me set about helping you to be free at once."

Mrs. Howard, however, had not gone this far in her imaginings—the idea had started in her brain, no doubt, but it had not matured yet, and all was hesitancy.

"I cannot promise anything. You must give me time to think, Lord Fordyce."

"Dearest, of course I will—but you will take steps to make yourself free—will you not? I have not asked, and I will not ask you a single question, only that you will tell me when I really may hope."

His voice was deep with feeling, and his distinguished, clever face was eager and full of devotion, as they turned an abrupt corner, and there came face to face with two of their American acquaintances in the hotel.

"Isn't this a charming walk, Mrs. Howard," and "Yes, isn't it!" and bows and passings on; but it broke the current, destroyed the spell, and released some spirit of mischief in Sabine's heart, for she would not

Digitized by Google

be grave for another second. She made Henry promise he would just amuse her and not refer again to those serious topics unless she gave him leave. And he, accustomed to go his own way unhampered by the caprices of the gentle sex, agreed!—so under the dominion of love had he become! for a woman, too, who in herself combined three things he had always disliked. She was an American, she was very young, and she had an equivocal position. But the little god does not consult the individual before he shoots his darts, and punishes the most severely those who have denied his power.

By the time they had reached the Savoy, Sabine, with that aptitude, though it was perfectly unconscious in her, which is the characteristic of all her countrywomen, had reduced Lord Fordyce to complete subjection, so that he was ready to do any mortal thing in the world for her, and willing to grasp suggestions of hope upon any terms.

She gave him a friendly smile, and disappeared up the stairs to their sitting-room—there to find Moravia indulging in nerves.

"I just want to scream, darling!" that lady said, and Sabine patted her hands.

"Then don't, Morri, dearest," she implored her. "You only want to because your mother, if she had been idle, would have wanted to scrub the floors—just as my father's business capacity came out in me just

Digitized by Google

now, and I fenced with and sampled a very noble gentleman instead of being simple with him. Let us get above our instincts—and be the real aristocrats we appear to the world!"

But the Princess had to have some sal volatile.

That night after dinner waywardness was upon Sabine. She would read the *New York Herald*, which she had absolutely not glanced at since their arrival at Carlsbad, so absorbed and entranced had she been in her walks in the green woods, and so little interested was she ever in the doings of the world.

She glanced at the Trouville news, and the Homburg news with wandering mind, and then her eye fell upon the polo at Ostende, and there she read that the English team had been giving a delightful dance at the Casino, where Mr. Michael Arranstoun had sumptuously entertained a party of his friends—amongst them Miss Daisy Van der Horn. The paragraph was worded with that masterly simplicity which distinguishes intelligent, modern journalism; and left the reader's mind confused as to words, but clear as to suggestion. Sabine Howard knew Miss Daisy Van der Horn. As she read, the bright, soft color left her cheeks, and then returned with a brilliant flush.

It was the first time for five years she had ever read the name of Arranstoun in any paper. She held the sheet firmly, and perused all the other information of the day—but when she put it down, and joined in the

Digitized by Google

general conversation, it could have been remarked that her eyes were glittering like fixed stars.

And when, for a moment, they all went out on the balcony to breathe in the warm, soft night, she whispered to Henry Fordyce:

"I have been thinking—I will, at all events, begin to take steps to be free."

But to his rapturous, "My darling!" she replied, with lowered lids:

"It will take some time—and you may not like waiting—And when I am free—I do not know—only—I am tired, and I want someone to help me to forget and begin again. Good-night."

Then, after she got to her room, she opened the window wide, and looked out upon the quiet firs. But nothing stilled the unrest in her heart.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

HÉRONAC was basking in the sun of an August morning, like some huge sea monster which had clambered upon the wet rocks.

The sea was intensely blue without a ripple upon it, and only the smallest white line marked where its waters caressed the shore.

Nature slumbered in the heat and was silent, and Sabine Howard, the châtelaine of this quaint château, stood looking out of the deep windows in her great sitting-room. It was a wonderful room. She had collected dark panelling and tapestry to hide the grim stone walls, and had managed to buy a splendidly carved and painted roof, while her sense of color had run riot in beautiful silks for curtains. It was a remarkable achievement for one so young, and who had begun so ignorantly. Her mother's family had been decently enough bred, and her maternal grandfather had been a fair artist, and that remarkable American adaptability which she had inherited from her father had helped her in many ways. Her sitting-room at Héronac was, of course, not perfect; and to the trained

Digitized by Google

eye of Henry Fordyce would present many anomalies; but no one could deny that it was a charming apartment, or that it was a glowing frame of rich tints for her youthful freshness.

She had really studied in these years of her residence there, and each month put something worth having into the storehouse of her intelligent mind. She was as immeasurably removed from the Sabine Delburg of convent days as light from darkness, and her companion had often been Monsieur le Curé, an enchanting Jesuit priest, who had the care of the souls of Héronac village. A great cynic, a pure Christian and a man of parts—a distant connection of the original family—Gaston d'Héronac had known the world in his day; and after much sorrow had found a hermitage in his own village—a consolation in the company of this half-French, half-American heiress, who had incorporated herself with the soil. He was now seventy years of age and always a gentleman, with few of the tiresome habits of the old.

What joy he had found in opening the mind of his young Dame d'Héronac!

It was frankly admitted that there were to be no discussions upon religion.

"I am a pagan, *cher père*," Sabine had said, almost immediately, "leave me!—and let me enjoy your sweet church and your fisherfolks' faith. I will come there every Sunday and say my prayers—*mes prières à moi*

Digitized by Google

—and then we can discuss philosophy afterwards or—what you will."

And the priest had replied:

"Religion is not of dogma. The paganism of Dame Sabine is as good in the sight of le bon Dieu as the belief of Jean Rivée, who knows that his boat was guided into the harbor on the night of the great storm by the Holy Virgin, who posed Herself by the helm. Heavens! yes—it is God who judges—not priests."

It can be easily understood that with two minds of this breadth, Père Anselme and Sabine Howard became real friends.

The Curé, when he read with her the masters of the *dix-septième* and the *dix-huitième* had a quaintly humorous expression in his old black eye.

"Not for girls or for priests—but for *des gens du monde*," he said to her one day, on putting down a volume of Voltaire.

"Of what matter," Sabine had answered. "Since I am not a girl, *cher maître*, and you were once not a priest, and we are both *gens du monde—hein?*"

His breeding had been of enormous advantage to him, enabling him to refrain from asking Sabine a single question; but he knew from her ejaculations as time went on that she had passed through some furnace during her eighteenth year, and it had seared her deeply. He even knew more than this; he knew almost

Digitized by Google

as much as Simone, eventually, but it was all locked in his breast and never even alluded to between them.

Sabine was waiting for him at this moment upon this glorious day in August. Père Anselme was going to breakfast with her.

He was announced presently, courtly and spare and distinguished in his thread-bare soutane, and they went in to the breakfast-room, a round chamber in the adjoining tower which had kitchens beneath. The walls were here so thick, that only the sky could be seen from any window except the southeastern one, from which you reviewed the gray slate roofs of the later building within the courtyard, the part which had been always habitable and which contained the salons and the guest chambers, with only an oblique view of the sea. Here, in Héronac's mistress' own apartments, the waves eternally encircled the base, and on rough days rose in great clouds of spray almost to the deep mullions.

"I am having visitors, Père Anselme," Sabine remarked, when Nicholas, her fat butler, was handing the omelette. "Madame Imogen is enchanted," and she smiled at that lady who had been waiting for déjeuner in the room before they had entered.

"*Tant mieux!*" responded the priest, with his mouth full of egg and mushroom. In his youth, the Héronacs had not imported English nurses, and he ate as his fathers had done before him.

"So much the better. Our lady is too given to soli-

Digitized by Google

tude, and but for the meteor-like descents of the Princess Torniloni and her tamed father—" (he used the word *aprivoisé*—"*son père aprivoisé*"!) we should here see very little of the outside world. And of what sex, madame, are these new acquaintances, if one may ask?"

"They are men, *cher père*—bold, bad Englishmen!—think of it! but I can only tell you the name of one of them—the other is problematical—he has merely been spoken of as, 'My friend'—but he is young, I gather, so just the affaire of Mère Imogen!"

"Why, that's likely!" chirped Madame Imogen, with a strong American accent, in her French English. "But I do pine for some gay things down here, don't you, Father?"

Père Anselme was heard to murmur that he found youth enough in his hostess, if you asked him.

"At the same time, we must welcome these Englishmen," he added, "should they be people of cultivation." He had heard that, in their upper classes, the Englishmen of to-day were still the greatest gentlemen left, and he would be pleased to meet examples of them.

"They will arrive at about five o'clock, I suppose," Sabine announced. "Have you seen about their rooms, Mère Imogen? Lord Fordyce is to have the Louis XIV suite, and the friend the one beyond; and we will only let them come into our house if they do not bore us. We shall dine in the *salle-à-manger* to-night and sit in the big salon."

Digitized by Google

These rooms were seldom opened, except when Princess Torniloni came to stay and brought her son, Sabine's godchild, who had elaborate nurseries prepared for him. No other visitor had ever crossed the causeway, and Madame Imogen's cute mind was asking itself why clemency had been accorded to these two Britons. The English, as she knew, were not a favored race with her employer.

They had been together for about two years now, she and Sabine—and were excellent friends.

Madame Imogen Aubert had been in great straits in Paris, when Sabine had heard of her through one of her many American acquaintances. Stupid speculation by an over-confident, silly French husband just before his death in Nevada had been the reason. Madame Imogen had the kindest heart and the hardest common sense, and did credit to a distant Scotch descent. She adored Sabine, as indeed she had reason to do, and looked after her house and her servants with a hawk's eye.

After déjeuner was over, the Dame d'Héronac and the Curé crossed the causeway bridge, and beyond the great towered gate entered another at the side, which conducted them into the garden, which sheltered itself behind immensely big walls from the road which curled beyond it, and the sea which bounded it on the northwest. Here, whatever horticultural talent and money could procure had been lavished for four years,

Digitized by Google

and the results were beginning to show. It was a glorious mass of summer flowers; and was the supreme pleasure of Père Anselme. He gardened with the fervor of an enthusiast, and was the joy and terror of the gardeners.

They spent two hours in delightful work, and then the Curé went his way—but just before he left for the hundred yards down the road where his cottage stood, Sabine said to him:

"Regard well Lord Fordyce to-night, *mon père.* It is possible I may decide to know him very intimately some day—when I am free."

The old priest looked at her questioningly.

"You intend to remove your shackles yourself, then, my child? You will not leave the affair to the good God—no?"

"I think that it will be wiser that I should be free soon, *mon père—le bon Dieu* helps those who help themselves. Au revoir—and do not be late for the Englishmen."

The priest shrugged his high shoulders, as he walked off.

"The dear child," he said to himself. "She does not know it, but the image of the fierce one has not faded entirely even yet—it is natural, though, that she should think of a mate. I must well examine this Englishman!"

Sabine went back into the walled garden again, and

Digitized by Google

sat down under the shelter of an arbour of green. She wanted to re-read a letter of Henry Fordyce's, which she had received that day by the early and only post.

It was rather a perfect letter for any young woman to have got, and she knew that and valued all its literary and artistic merits.

They had had long and frequent conversations in their last three days at Carlsbad, during which they had grown nearer and still better friends. His gentleness, his courtesy and diffidence were such incense to her self-esteem, considering the position of importance he held in his own country and the great place he seemed to occupy in the Princess' regard. And he was her servant—her slave—and would certainly make the most tender lover—some day!

On their last afternoon, he had taken her hands and kissed them.

"Sabine," he had said, with his voice trembling with emotion. "I have shown you that I can control myself, and have not made any love to you as I have longed to do. Won't you be generous, dearest, and give me some definite hope—some definite promise that, when you are free, you will give yourself to me and will be my wife——?"

And she had answered—with more fervor than she really felt, because she would hide some unaccountable reluctance:

Digitized by Google

"Yes—I have written to-day to my lawyer, Mr. Parsons—to advise me how to begin to take the necessary steps—and when it all goes through, then—yes—I will marry you."

But she would not let him kiss her, which he showed signs of desiring to do.

"You must wait until I am free, though my marriage is no tie; it has never been one—after the first year. I will tell you the whole story, if you want to hear it—but I wish to forget it all—only it is fair for you to know there is no disgrace connected with it in any way."

"I should not care one atom if there were," Henry said, ecstatically. "You yourself could never have touched any disgrace. Your eyes are as pure as the stars!"

"I was extremely ignorant and foolish, as one is at seventeen. And now I want to make something of life—some great thing—and your goodness and your high and fine ideals will help me."

"My dearest!" he had cried fervently.

Sabine had said to the Princess that night, as they talked in their sitting-room:

"Do you know, Morri, I have almost decided to marry this Englishman—some day. You have often told me I was foolish not to free myself from any bonds, however lightly they held me—and I have never wanted to—but now I do—at once—as soon as possible

Digitized by Google

—before—my husband can suggest being free of me! I have written to Mr. Parsons already—and I suppose it will not take very long. The laws there, I believe, are not so binding as in England—" and then she stopped short.

"The laws—where?" Moravia could not refrain from asking; her curiosity had at last won the day.

"In Scotland, Morri. He was a Scotchman, not an American at all as every one supposes."

The Princess' eyes opened wide—and she had to bite her lips to keep from asking more.

"I have never seen him since the day after we were married—there cannot be any difficulty about getting a divorce—can there?"

"None, I should think," the Princess said shortly, and they kissed one another good-night and each went to her room.

But Moravia sat a long time, after her maid had left her, staring into space.

Fate was very cruel and contrary. It gave her everything that most people could want, and refused her the one thing she desired herself.

"He adores Sabine—who will trample on him—she always rules everything—and I would have been his sympathetic companion, and would have let him rule me—!" Then something she could not reconcile in her mind struck her.

If Sabine had never seen her husband since the day

Digitized by Google

after she was married—what had caused her to be so pale and sad and utterly changed when she came to her, Moravia, in Rome—a year or more afterwards, and to have made her break entirely with her uncle and aunt? The secret of her friend's life lay in that year—that year after she herself married and went off with her husband Girolamo to Italy—the year which Sabine had spent in America—alone. But she knew very well that, fond as they were of one another, Sabine would probably never tell her about it. So presently she got into bed and, sighing at the incongruity and inconsiderateness of circumstance, she turned out the light.

Sabine that same night read of further entertainments at Ostende in the *New York Herald*—and shut her full, firm lips with an ominous force. And so she and Henry had parted at the Carlsbad station next day with the understanding between them that, when Sabine could tell him that she was free, he would be at liberty to press his suit and she would give a favorable answer.

She thought of these past things now for a moment while she re-read Lord Fordyce's letter. It told her, there in her Héronac garden, in a hurried P. S. that a friend had joined him that moment at Havre, and clamored to be taken on the trip, too, claiming an old promise. He was quite a nice young man—but if she did not want any extra person, she was to wire to——, where they would arrive about eleven o'clock, and there this interloper should be ruthlessly marooned!

Digitized by Google

The post had evidently been going, and the P. S. must have been written in frightful haste after the advent of the friend—for his name was not even given.

Sabine had not wired. She felt a certain sense of relief. It would make someone to talk to Madame Imogen and the Curé—and cause there to be no *gêne*.

Then her thoughts turned to Henry himself with tender friendship. So dear a companion, and how glad she would be to see him again. The ten days since they had parted at Carlsbad seemed actually long! Surely it was a wise thing to do to start her real life with one whom she could so truly respect; there could be no pitfalls and disappointments! And his great position in England would give scope for her ambition, which never could be satisfied like Moravia's with just social things. She would begin to study English politics and the other great matters which Henry was interested in. He would find that what she had told him at Carlsbad was true, and that, although he was naturally prejudiced against Americans, he would have to admit that she, as his wife, played the part as well, if not better, than one of his own countrywomen could have done. She thrilled a little as the picture came up before her of the large outlook she would have to survey, and the great situation she would have to adorn, but sure of Henry's devoted kindness and gentleness all the time.

Yes—she would certainly marry him, perhaps by

Digitized by Google

next year. Mr. Parsons had written only yesterday, saying he had begun to take steps, as her freedom must come from the side of her husband—who could divorce her for desertion. She could not urge this plea against him, since she had left him of her own free will.

"He will jump at the chance, naturally," she said to herself—"and then, perhaps, he will marry Daisy Van der Horn!"

She was still a very young woman, you see, for all her four years of deep education in the world of books!

She put the letter back in her basket below the flowers she had picked, and prepared to return to the château. To arrange various combinations of color in vases was her peculiar joy—and her flower decorations were her special care. She was just entering the great towered gate of Héronac where resided the concierge, when she heard the whir of a motor approaching in the distance, and she hurriedly slipped inside old Berthe's parlor. She disliked dust and strangers, who, fortunately, very seldom came upon this unbeaten track.

She was watching from the window until they should have passed—it could not be her guests, it was quite an hour too soon, when the motor whizzed round the bend and stopped short at the gate! It was a big open one, and the occupants wore goggles over their eyes; but she recognized Lord Fordyce's figure, as he

Digitized by Google

got out followed by a very tall young man, who called out cheerily:

"Yes—this must be the brigand's stronghold, Henry; let's thunder at the bell."

Then for a moment her knees gave way beneath her, and she sank into Berthe's carved oaken chair. For the voice was the voice of Michael Arranstoun—and when he pulled the goggles off, she could see, as she peered through the window, his sunburnt face and bold blue eyes.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

OSTENDE had begun to bore Michael Arranstoun intolerably—he had lamed his best pony and Miss Daisy Van der Horn was getting on his nerves. At Ostende she, to use one of her own expressions, "was not the only pebble on the beach." His nerves had had a good deal of exercise among that exceedingly pleasure-loving, frolicsome crew.

Five years in the wilds had not changed him much, except to add to his annoying charm. He was more absolutely dare-devil and sure of himself and careless of all else than ever. Miss Daisy Van der Horn—and a number of Clarices and Germaines and Lolos—were "just crazy" about him. And they mattered to him not a single straw. He laughed—and kissed them when he felt inclined, and then when all had begun to weary him he rode away—or rather sent his polo ponies back to England and got into the express for Paris, expecting there to find Henry Fordyce returned from Carlsbad—only to hear that he had just started in his motor

Digitized by Google

for Brittany, and by that evening would have arrived at Havre.

Michael had nothing special to do and so followed him there at once by train, coming upon him just as he was closing his letter to Mrs. Howard. Then in his usual whirlwind way, which must be obeyed—he had persuaded Henry to take him on with him, inwardly against that astute politician's, but diffident lover's will.

"Look here, Michael," he had said, "I am going to see the lady of my heart—you know, and you will probably be in the way!"

"Not a bit, old boy—I'll play the helpful friend and spin things along. What's she like?"

Here Lord Fordyce gave a guarded description—but with the enthusiasm of a man who is no longer quite young but madly in love.

"Good Lord!" whistled Michael. "She must be a daisy! And when are you going to be married, old man? I'll lend you Arranstoun for the honeymoon—damned good place for a honeymoon—" and then he stopped short suddenly and laughed with a strange regretful sound in his mirth.

"Alas!" Henry sighed. "I cannot say—she is an American, you know, and has been married to a brute of her own nation out west, whom she has to get perfectly free of before I can have the honor to call her mine."

"Whew!"

Digitized by Google

"Yes, it is a dreadful bore having to wait. They arrange divorces wonderfully well over there though it is only a question of a few months, I suppose—but she would be worth waiting for for ten years——"

"It is simply glorious to hear you raving so, old bird!" Michael laughed. "When I think of the lectures you used to give me about women—mere recreations for a man's leisure moments, I think you called them, and not to be taken seriously in a man's real life!"

"I have completely changed my opinions," Lord Fordyce announced, rather nettled. "So would any man if he knew Mrs. Howard."

"Howard?" asked Michael—"but anyone can be a Talbot or a Howard or a Cavendish out there—so she is a Mrs. Howard, is she? I wonder who the husband was—I had a rascally cousin of that name who went to Arizona—perhaps she married him."

"Her husband was an American," Henry rejoined, "and is in a madhouse or an institution for inebriates, I believe."

"Well, I wish you all joy, Henry, I do, indeed—and I promise you I will do all I can to help you through with it. I won't retaliate for your thundering niggardness five years ago, when you would not even be my best man, do you remember?"

"This is quite different, my dear boy," Lord Fordyce assured him with dignity. "You were going to

Digitized by Google

do what I thought a most casual thing, just for your own ends, but I—Michael—" and his cultivated voice vibrated with feeling—"I love this woman as I never thought I should love anything on God's earth."

"Then here's to you!" said Mr. Arranstoun, and ringing the bell for the waiter, ordered a pint of champagne to drink his friend's health.

So they had started in the motor after breakfast next day and that night slept at St. Malo—getting to Héronac without adventure the following afternoon.

When no telegram was awaiting Lord Fordyce at —— where they breakfasted, he remarked to Michael:

"She does not mind your coming—or she would have wired—I wish I were as indifferent about it—Michael —" and Henry stammered a little—"you'll promise me as a friend—you will not look into her eyes with your confounded blue ones and try to cut me out."

For some reason this appeal touched something in Michael's heart, his voice was full of cordiality and his blue bold eyes swam with kindly affection as he answered:

"I'm not a beast, Henry—and I don't want every woman I see—and anyone you fancied would in any case be sacred to me," and he held out his hand. "Give you my word as I told you before, I'll not only promise you on my honor that I'll not cut in myself, but I'll do everything I can to help you, old man," then he

Digitized by Google

laughed to hide the seriousness of his feeling—"even to lending Arranstoun for the honeymoon."

So they grasped hands and sealed the bargain and got into the motor and went on their way.

The first view of Héronac had enchanted them both, it was indeed a unique place.

"What taste!" Henry had said. "Fancy a young woman knowing and seeing at once the possibilities of such a place!"

"It is as grim as Arranstoun and nearly as old," Michael exclaimed. "I am glad we came."

Sabine shrank back into Berthe's little kitchen and signalled to her not to make known the hostess' presence—but to let the gentlemen drive over the causeway bridge to the courtyard—where they would be told by Nicholas that she was in the garden, and would probably be brought there to her by Madame Imogen who would have welcomed them.

Her firm will forced her to pull herself together and decide what to do when they should come face to face. To be totally unconcerned was the best thing—to look and act as though Michael Arranstoun were indeed a perfect stranger introduced to her for the first time in her life. It would take him some moments to be certain that she was Sabine—his wife—and he would then not be likely to make a scene before Henry—and when the moment for plain speaking came, she would sternly demand to be set free. She had kept silence to Henry

Digitized by Google

as to who her husband really was—for no reason except that the whole subject disturbed her greatly—the very mention of Michael's name or the thought of him always filling her with wild and mixed emotions. She had schooled herself in the years that had gone by since their parting, into absolutely banishing his memory every time it recurred. She had a vague feeling that she must be free of him, and safe before she could even pronounce his name to Lord Fordyce, who naturally must know eventually. There was an unaccountable and not understood fear in her—fear that in the discussion which must arise if she spoke of who her husband was to Henry, that something might transpire, or that she might hear something which would reawaken certain emotions, and weaken her determination to break the even empty bond with Michael. And now she had seen him again with her mortal eyes, and she knew that she was trembling and tingling with a mad sensation of she knew not what—hatred and revulsion she hoped! but was only sure of one aspect of it—that of wild excitement.

No one—not a single soul—neither Simone—Madame Imogen—nor Père Anselme himself must be allowed to see that she recognized Michael—her belief that her countrywomen were fine actresses should stand her in good stead, and enable her to play this part of unconsciousness to perfection. *She would* conquer herself—and she stamped her little foot there in the

Digitized by Google

high turret bower in the garden where she had retired. Its windows opened straight out to the sea and she often had tea there. There would be no use in all her prayers for calm and poise if they should desert her now in this great crisis of her life. She was bound to Henry by her promised word, given of her own free will —and she meant to keep it, and do everything in her power to make herself free. She was an extremely honest person, honest even with herself, and she realized that either her own weakness or indecision, or some other motive had forced her to give a definite answer to Lord Fordyce—and that he was too fine a character to be played with and tossed about because of her moods. She had mastered every sign of emotion by the time Madame Imogen's comfortable figure, accompanied by the two men, could be seen advancing in the distance. She rose with the gracious smile of a hostess and held out her hand—pleased surprise upon her face.

"So you have come! but earlier than I thought," and she shook hands with Henry, and then turned to his friend without the slightest embarrassment, as Lord Fordyce spoke his name.

"How do you do," she said politely. "You are both very welcome to Héronac."

Michael had merely seen a pretty outline of a young woman until they had got quite close and she had raised her head and lifted the shadow of her big garden

Digitized by Google

sun-bonnet—and then he stiffened suddenly and grew very pale. He was a little behind the other two, and they observed nothing, but Sabine saw the change of color in his healthy handsome face, and the look of surprise and incredulity and puzzle which grew in his blue eyes.

"How do you do?" he murmured, and then pulled himself together and looked at her hard.

But she stood his scrutiny with perfect unconcern—even meeting his eye with a blank, agreeable want of recognition; while she made some ordinary remark about their journey. Then pointing to her basket:

"See—I was picking flowers for my sitting-room and I did not expect you for another hour—what a silent motor you must have that its noise did not penetrate here!"

Henry was so overcome with joy to see her, and that she should be so gracious and sweet—he said all sorts of nice things and walked by her side as they came down from the turret summer-house. She looked the picture of a fresh June rose as she carried her basket full of August flowers—phloxes and penstemons and a great bunch of late sweet peas. And Michael felt almost that he was staggering a little as he followed with Madame Imogen, the shock had been so great.

Was it really Sabine—his wife!—or could she have a double in the world. Maddening uncertainty was his portion. He must know, he must be certain—and if

Digitized by Google

she were his wife—what then? What did it mean? He could not claim her—she was engaged to Henry, his friend—to whom he had given his word of honor that he would help as much as he could. It was no wonder that he answered Madame Imogen's prattle, crisp and American and amusing though it was, quite at random—his whole attention being upon the pair in front.

Sabine also found that she was not hearing a word Henry said, but that the wildest excitement which she had ever known was coursing through her blood. At last she did catch that he was telling her that never had she been more beautiful or had brighter eyes.

"This place must suit you even better than Carlsbad," he said.

She answered laughingly and led the way toward the gate and so across the causeway and on into her own sitting-room where they would find tea. She supposed afterwards that she had talked sensibly, but never had any recollection of what she had said.

The room was looking singularly beautiful with the wonderful coloring of the splendid curtains, and the tapestry and dark wood. And it was a homely place, too, with quantities of book-cases and comfortable chairs for all its vast size. Michael thought there was a faint look of his own room at Arranstoun—and he joined the two who had advanced to one of the huge embrasures of the windows where the tea table was laid

Digitized by Google

—here there were velvet-covered window seats where one could lounge and gaze out at the sea.

"What an exquisite place!" he exclaimed. "It reminds me of Arranstoun, does it not you, Henry?—although that is not near the sea."

The color deepened in Sabine's cheeks—had she unconsciously made it resemble that place? She did not know, and the suggestion struck her with surprise.

Michael had recognized her of course, she saw that, but he was a gentleman and intended to play the game. That was an immense relief. She could allow herself to look at him critically now—not with just the cursory glance she had bestowed upon Henry's friend at first—for he had turned and was talking to Madame Imogen whom Sabine had signed to pour out the tea—she was not sure if her own hand might not have shaken a little and it were wiser to take no risks.

He was horribly good-looking—that jumped to the eye—and with a careless, indifferent grace—five years had only matured and increased his attractions. He had "it"—manifesting in every part of him and his atmosphere! A magnetism, a hateful, odious power which she felt, and fiercely resented. He had recovered completely from whatever shock he had felt upon seeing her it would seem! for his face looked absolutely unconcerned now and perfectly at ease.

She called all her forces together and played the part of the radiant, well-mannered hostess, being even extra

Digitized by Google

sweet and charming to Henry, who was in the seventh heaven in consequence. The dreaded introduction of his too-fascinating friend at Héronac had passed off well and his adored lady did not seem to be taking any notice of him.

Michael did not seek by word or look to engage her in personal conversation; if he had really been a stranger who did not even find his hostess fair, he could not have been more casual or less impressed. And all the while his pulses were bounding and he was growing more and more filled with astonishment and emotion.

At last a thought came. Why, of course! Henry had told her he was coming, so she had expected the meeting and had had time to school herself to act! But this straw was not long vouchsafed him, and then stupefaction set in, for Henry chanced to say:

"You must forgive me for not having time to write you my friend's name in my postscript, the post was off that minute—you had to take him on trust!"

"I do not know that I even caught it just now!" Sabine returned archly. "Mr.——?"

And Henry, engaged for a moment taking a second cup of tea from Madame Imogen's fat hand, Michael answered for him, looking straight into her eyes:

"Michael Howard Arranstoun of Arranstoun over the border in Scotland—like Gretna Green."

"How romantic that sounds," Madame Imogen

Digitized by Google

chimed in. "Why, it's a name fit for a stage play I do think. A party of my friends visited that very castle only last fall. Mrs. Howard dear, it's as well known as the Trossachs to investigators of the antique!"

"Wonderfully interesting!" Sabine remarked blandly—putting more sugar in her tea—at which Michael's eyebrows raised themselves in a whimsical way—back had rushed to him the recollection that on the only occasion they had ever drunk tea together before, she had said that she liked "lumps and lumps of it!"

"You probably know England?" he hazarded politely.

"Very little. I was once there for a month when I was a child; we went to see Windermere and the Lakes."

"You got no further north? That was a pity, our country is most beautiful—but it is not too late—you may go there yet some day."

"Who knows?" and she laughed gaily—she had to allow herself some outlet, she felt she would otherwise have screamed.

Michael looked away out to sea and he told himself he must not tease her any more. She was astonishingly game—so astonishingly game that but for the name "Howard" he could have almost believed that this young woman was his Sabine's double—but he remembered now that she had said she was going to call herself Mrs. Howard because otherwise she would not be able to "have any fun!"

Digitized by Google

He had never recollected it since, not even when Henry had told him the lady of his heart was called Howard—obscured by his friend's assertion that her husband was an American, he had not for an instant suspected the least connection with himself.

Until he could find out the meaning of all this comedy, he must not let Henry have an idea that there was anything underneath; and then with a pang of mortification and pain he remembered his promise to Henry —and he clenched his hands in his coat pockets, he was indeed tied and bound.

Sabine for her part felt she could bear the situation no longer; she must be alone—so on the plea of letters to write, she dismissed them with Madame Imogen to show them to their rooms in the other part of the house which was connected to this, her two great turrets and middle immense room, by a passage which went along from the turret which contained her bedroom.

"You won't mind, perhaps, dining at half past seven?" she said as she paused at her door, "because our good curé, Père Anselme is coming, and he hates to sit up late."

And with the corner of his eye, Michael saw that before he hurried after him, Henry had bent and surreptitiously kissed his hostess' hand—and a sudden blinding, unreasoning rage shook him as he stalked on to his allotted apartment.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

SABINE decided to be a little late for dinner—three minutes, just to give the rest of the party time to be assembled in the big salon. She was coming from the communicating passage to her part of the house when Mr. Arranstoun came out of his room, and they were obliged to go down the great staircase together.

To see him suddendly in evening dress like this brought her wedding night back so vividly to her, she with difficulty kept a gasp from her breath. He was certainly the most splendidly good-looking creature, with his blue eyes and dark hair and much fairer little moustache.

"I am late!" she cried laughing, before he could speak a word. "Père Anselme will scold me! Come along!" and she tripped forward with a glance over her shoulder.

Michael's eyes blazed—she was a truly bewitching morsel in her fresh white frock with its bunch of crimson sweet peas stuck in the belt.

Digitized by Google

"Your flowers should be stephanotis," he said, and that was all, as he followed her down the stairs.

"I cannot bear them," she retorted and shuddered a little. "I only care for out-door, simple things like my sweet peas."

He did not speak as they went along the gallery—this disconcerted her—what did it mean? She had been prepared to fence with him, and keep him in his place, she was ready to defend herself on all sides—and no defence seemed necessary! A sudden cold feeling came over her as though excitement had died down and she opened the salon door quickly and advanced into the room.

Michael had come to a determination while dressing—Henry had walked in and smoked a cigarette with him before he began, and had then showed plainly his joy and satisfaction. She—his worshiped lady—had never before been so tender and gracious, and he was awfully happy because things were going well. And what did his friend Michael think of his choice? Was she not the sweetest woman in the world?

Michael said he had seen better-looking ones, but admitted she had charm. He was really suffering, the situation was so impossible and he had not yet made up his mind what he ought to do—tell Henry straight out that Sabine was his wife or what? If he did that he might be going contrary to some plan of hers—for she evidently had no intention yet of informing Lord

Digitized by Google

Fordyce, or of giving the least indication that she recognized him—Michael. It was the most grotesque puzzle and contained an element of the tragic, too—for one of them.

Henry's happiness and contentment touched him—his dear old friend!—he felt extraordinarily upset. But when Lord Fordyce had gone he rapidly reviewed matters and made up his mind. At all events, for the present, he would be guided by what Sabine's attitude should be herself. He would certainly see her alone on the following day and then she would most likely broach the subject and they could agree what to do—for that Henry must know some day was an incontestable fact. He, Michael, would make some excuse and leave Héronac by the next evening, it was impossible to go on playing such a part, and not fair to any one, least of all to his friend.

"I will give her to-night to declare her hand," he thought, as his valet, no longer the dignified Johnson, handed him his coat, "and then if she will not put the cards down—I must."

But when he opened his door and saw her exquisite slender figure tripping forward from the dark passage, a fierce pain gripped his heart, and he said between his teeth:

"My God! if it had not been too late!"

The Dame d'Héronac was in wild spirits at dinner—and her cheeks burned like glowing roses.

Digitized by Google

Monsieur le Curé watched her with his wise, black eye.

"The child is not herself," he thought. "It is possible that this Englishman may mean a great deal to her —but he is of the gentle type, not of the sort one would believe to make strong passions—no—now if it had been the other one—the friend—that one could have seen some light through—a young man well able to fill the heart of any woman—a fine young man, a splendid young man—but yes."

Madame Imogen made no reflections, she was too delighted with their gay repast, and helped with her jolly wit to keep the ball rolling.

Henry felt slightly intoxicated with happiness—while in Michael, passions of various sorts were rising, against his will.

A devil was in Sabine—never had she been so alluring, so feminine, so completely removed from her usual grave, indifferent self.

She did not look at Michael once or vouchsafe him any conversation beyond what cordial politeness compelled. It was to Père Anselme that she almost made love, with shy sallies at Henry, and merry replies to Madame Imogen. But her whole atmosphere was radiating with provoking fascination—and as they all rose from table she took Lord Fordyce's arm.

"In England, I hear you men remain in the dining room to drink all sorts of ports—but here in my France

Digitized by Google

we expect you to be sociable and come with us at once—you may smoke where you choose."

Henry could not refrain from caressing with his other hand the little cold one lying on his arm as they walked along—while he whispered with passionate devotion:

"My darling, darling girl!"

"Hush!" she answered nervously. "Your friend will hear!"

"And if he does! what matter, dearest—he knows that I love you, and that as soon as you are free you are going to be my wife."

There must have been a slight roughness in the carpet which slid upon the slippery floor, for the Dame d'Héronac stumbled a little and then gasped:

"He—knows that——!"

And by the time they all reached the salon, her rosy cheeks were pale, while the pupils of her violet eyes were so large as to make them appear to be black as night.

The gay sprite of the dinner-table seemed to have taken her departure and a dignified and serious hostess filled her place. A hostess who discoursed of gardens, and architecture, and such subjects—and at ten o'clock when the Père Anselme gave his blessing and wished the company good-night, also gave a white hand to her guests, saying that Madame Imogen would show them the small salon where they could smoke and have their drinks before retiring to their rooms, then she bowed to

Digitized by Google

them and walked off slowly to her part of the house.

When she had gone, Michael said a little hoarsely to Henry:

"I have got the fiend of a headache, old man. I think I won't smoke, but turn in at once."

An hour or two later, when the whole château was wrapped in darkness—the mistress of it crept from her bed-room to the great sitting-room, and turning on the light, she unlocked a blue despatch-box which stood beside her writing-table. From this she took a letter, marked a little with former perusals—and she read it over once more from beginning to end.

It had

ARRANSTOUN CASTLE,
SCOTLAND,

stamped upon it in red and it bore a date in June, 1907. It had no beginning and thus it ran:

> Since after everything I wake to find you have chosen to leave me you can abide by your decision. I will not follow you or ever seek to bring you back. It is useless to ask you if you meant that you forgave me—because your going proves that you really have not—so make what you please of your life as I shall make what I please of mine.
>
> MICHAEL ARRANSTOUN.

When she put the paper back again, glittering tears gathered and rolled in shining drops down her cheeks.

He had meant that last paragraph then, and he meant

Digitized by Google

it now evidently, since he knew that she was pledged to marry Henry when she should be free, and had made no protest. Perhaps he was glad and intended to marry Miss Daisy van der Horn! Her tears dried suddenly—and her cheeks burned. She must think this situation out, and not just drift. It was plain that Michael had been astonished to the point of stupefaction on seeing her. He could not have known then that his friend wished to marry her—Sabine—only that his friend wished to marry the lady they were going to see. But he knew it afterwards, he knew it at dinner—and yet he said never a word. What could it mean? What could be best to do? Perhaps to see him alone in the morning and ask him to grant her freedom and get the divorce as quickly as possible. She could count upon herself not to betray the slightest feeling in the interview. If only that strange turn of fate had not brought Lord Fordyce into her life, what glorious pleasure she would now take in trying her uttermost to fascinate and attract Michael—not that she desired him for herself!—only to punish him for all the past! But she was not free. She had given her word to Henry. The humiliation of feeling that Michael was making no protest, and would apparently from this fact agree willingly to divorce her, stung her pride and made her want to make him suffer and regret in some way. If she could believe that it was paining him, she would be glad— and if it appeared possible to keep up the pretence of unrecogni-

Digitized by Google

tion for longer than to-morrow, she would certainly do so; it was a frantic excitement in any case, and she adored difficult games. Then as she put the letter back in her despatch-box, her hand touched a large blue enamel locket, and with a shiver she hastily shut down the lid, and as one fleeing from a ghost she ran back to bed.

Michael meanwhile was pacing his room in deep and agitated thought.

How supremely attractive she was! And to have to give her up to Henry; it was too frightfully cruel. But he had absolutely no right to stand in either of their lights. He had not even the right to undermine his friend's influence by deed or look, since he had given him his word of honor that he would not do so. What a blind fool he had been all those years ago to let passionate rage at Sabine's daring to leave him make him write her that letter. He would not have done it if he had not felt such an intolerable brute—and glad to cut the whole thing by accepting Latimer Berkeley's suggestion to join him for the China expedition at once. The Berkeley letter coming that next morning was a stroke of fate. If he had had a day to think about things, he would have followed his impulse after the anger died down, and gone after her to Mr. Parsons' London address, but he had already wired to Latimer and his resentful blood was up.

He remembered how he had not allowed himself to

Digitized by Google

think of her—but had concentrated his whole mind upon his sport. For it had been tremendous sport and had interested him deeply, that journey to Tibet. And however strong feelings may be at moments—absence and fresh interests dull them. To banish her memory became a good deal easier as time went on, and even the idea to divorce her if she wished did not seem too hard.

But now he had seen her again—and every spell she had cast over him on that June night was renewed tenfold. She was everything he could desire—she was beautiful and sweet and witty, with a charm which only complete independence and indifference can ever give a woman in the eyes of such a man as he. This he did not reason out—thinking himself a very ordinary person—in fact, never thinking of himself at all or what his temperament was affected by. He did not realize either that the very fact of Sabine's being now out of his reach made her appear the one and only thing he cared to possess. He knew nothing except that he felt perfectly mad with fate—mad with himself for making an unconditional promise to Henry, perfectly furious that he had been too stupid to connect the name of Howard at once with his wife.

And here he was sleeping in her castle—not she sleeping in his! And he was conforming to her lead—not she following his. And the only thing for a gentleman to do under the complicated circumstances was to speedily divorce her according to the Scottish law and let her

Digitized by Google

marry his friend, Henry Fordyce—give them his blessing and lend them Arranstoun for the honeymoon!

When he got thus far in his meditations, he simply stood in the middle of the room and cursed aloud.

Never in his whole life had bolts or bars or circumstances been allowed to keep him from his will.

And then it did come to his shrewd mind that these things were not circumstances, but were barriers forged *by himself*.

"If I had not been such an awful brute—and the moment had not been—as it was—I might have gradually made her love me and kept her always for my own!" his thoughts ran. "Well—we were both too young then—and now I must take the consequences and at least not be a swine to poor old Henry."

With superb irony, among his letters next morning which he had wired to be forwarded to Héronac, there came one from his lawyer, informing him that he had received a guarded communication from his wife's representative, Mr. Parsons—with what practically amounted to a request that he, Mr. Arranstoun, should begin to set the law in motion, to break the bond between them—and his lawyer inquired what his wishes were upon the subject and what should be the nature of their reply?

To get this at Héronac—Sabine's house! He shook with fierce laughter in his bed.

Then his temper got up, and he came to a fresh de-

Digitized by Google

termination. He would break her pride—she should kneel if she wanted her freedom, she should have it only if she asked him for it herself. He would not leave that day after all! He would stay and play the comedy to its end. While she would not recognize him, he would not recognize her. It was she who had set the pace and the responsibility of not informing Henry lay at her door. It was a damnably exciting game—far beyond polo or even slaying long-haired tigers in Manchuria—and he would play it and bluff without a card in his hand.

He was not a noble hero, you see, but just a strong and passionate young man—with "it"!

The day was so gorgeous—Sabine woke with some kind of joyousness. She was only twenty-two years old and supremely healthy; and however complicated fate seemed to be, when nerves and appetite are perfect and the sun is shining, it is really impossible to feel too gloomy.

Her periwinkle cambric was a reflection of her eyes, and her brown hair seemed filled with rays of gold as she stepped across the courtyard at about ten o'clock on her way to the garden. Her guests would sleep late —and at breakfast at twelve would be time enough to see them.

But Michael caught sight of the top of a wide straw hat, and the flutter of a bluish gown from his window, and did not hesitate for a second. Henry, he knew, was

Digitized by Google

only in his bath, while he himself was fully dressed in immaculate white flannels.

It did not take him five minutes to gain the courtyard, or to saunter over the causeway bridge, and into the garden—he had brought the English papers with him, which had been among his post. He would pretend he had sought solitude and would be duly surprised and pleased to encounter his hostess. That he had no business in her private garden at all without her invitation did not trouble him, things like that never blocked his way; he had always been too welcome anywhere for such an aspect even to have presented itself to him.

He played his part to perfection—reconnoitering as stealthily as when he was stalking big game, until he perceived his quarry at the far end among the lavender, giving orders to a gardener. He then turned in the opposite direction, with great unconsciousness, to read the paper in peace apparently being his only care! Here he paced the walk which cut off her retreat from the gate, never glancing up. Sabine saw him of course, and her heart began to beat—was it possible for a man to be so good-looking or so utterly casual and devil-may-care! If she walked toward the arbor turret he would be obliged to see her when she came to the end, and then must come up and say good-morning. She picked up her flower-basket and went that way, and with due surprise and pleasure, Michael looked up from his

Digitized by Google

paper at exactly the right moment and caught sight of her.

He came toward her with just the proper amount of haste and raised his straw hat in a gay good-morning.

"Isn't it a divine day," he said. "I had to come out and read the papers—and the courtyard looked so dull and I did not know where else to go—it is luck finding you here!"

"I always come into the garden in the morning when it is fine—I know every plant and they are all my friends." Then to hide the pleasurable excitement she was feeling, she bent down and picked a bit of lavender.

"I love that smell—won't you give me some, too?" he pleaded—and she handed him a sprig which he fixed in his white coat. "You have made the most enchanting place of this," he next told her. "Can't we go up and sit in that summer-house while you tell me how you began? Henry said all this was a ruin when you bought it some years ago—it is extraordinarily clever of you."

Not the slightest embarrassment was in his manner, not the smallest look of extra meaning in his eyes; he was simply a guest and she a hostess, out together in the sunlight. A sense of unreality stole over Sabine. It could not be all true—it was just some dream—a little more vivid, that was all, than those which used to come to her of him sometimes during—that year. She almost felt that she would like to put out her hand and

Digitized by Google

touch him to see if he were tangible or a thing of illusion as she led the way to the turret summer-house.

The wall which protected the garden from the sea was very high and this little tower had been in the original fortifications and had been cleverly adapted to its present use. It was open, with glass which slid back on the southern side, and its great windows looked out over the blue waters and granite rocks on the other. The little bay curved round so that from there you got a three-quarter view of the château.

Sabine put her basket down, and climbing up the wooden step she seated herself upon the high window-seat, her feet dangling while she opened the casement wide. Michael stood beside her leaning upon the sill—so that she was slightly above him.

"What a glorious view!" he exclaimed; "it is certainly a perfect spot. Why, it has everything! The sea and its waves to dash up at it—and then this lovely garden for shelter and peace. What a fortunate young woman you are!"

"Yes, am I not?"

"I have an old castle, too—perhaps Henry has told you about it. We have owned it ever since Adam, I suppose!" and he laughed. "The grim part of this is rather like it in a way; I mean the stone passages and huge rooms—but of course the architecture is different. It has been the scene of every sort of fight. I should like to show it to you some day."

Digitized by Google

Stupefaction rose in Sabine's mind. After all, had she been mistaken, and had he really not recognized her?—or had her acting of the night before convinced him that his first ideas must be wrong and that she was really not his wife! Excitement thrilled her. But if he was playing a part, she then must certainly play, too, and not speak to him about the divorce until he spoke to her. Thus they were unconsciously the one set against the other and both determined that the other should show first hand. It looked as though the interests of Lord Fordyce might be somehow forgotten!

They talked thus for half an hour, Michael asking questions about Héronac with polite interest and without ever saying a sentence with a double meaning, and she replying with frank information, and both burning with excitement and zest. Then her great charm began to affect him so profoundly that unconsciously something of eagerness and emotion crept into his voice. It was one of those voices full of extraordinarily attractive cadences at any time, and made for the seducing of a woman's ear. Sabine knew that she was enjoying herself with a wild kind of forbidden joy—but she did not analyze its cause. It could not be mean to Henry just to talk about Héronac when she was not by word or look deliberately trying to fascinate his friend—she was only being naturally polite and casual.

"Arranstoun only wants the sea," Michael said at last, "and then it would be as perfect as this. "I have

Digitized by Google

a big, old sitting-room, too, that was once part of a great hall, and my bedroom is the other half—a suite all to myself—but I have not been there for five years —I am going back from here."

"How strange to be away from your home for so long," Sabine remarked innocently. "Where have you been?"

Then he told her all about China and Tibet.

"I had taken some kind of distaste for Arranstoun and shirked going there—I shall have to face it now, I suppose, because it is such hard luck on the people when an owner is away, and so one must come up to the scratch."

"Yes," she agreed, "one must always do that."

"I used to think out a lot of things when I was in the wilds—and I grew to know that one is a great fool when young—and a great brute."

She began to pull her lavender to pieces—this conversation was growing too dangerously fascinating and must be stopped at once.

"It is getting nearly breakfast-time," she said gaily, "and I just want to pick a big bunch of sweet peas before the sun gets on them, won't you help me?—and then we will go in."

She slid to the floor before he could put out a hand to assist her, and with her swift, graceful movements led the way to the tall sticks where the last of the summer sweet peas grew.

Digitized by Google

Here she handed him the basket and told him to work hard—and all the while she chattered of the ways of these flowers, and the trouble she had had to make them grow there, and would not once let the conversation upon this subject flag.

"Some day when I live in England, I suppose I can have a lovely garden there—it is famous for gardens, isn't it? I take in *Country Life* and try to learn from it."

"Yes," he answered, and grew stiff. The sudden picture of her living in England—with Henry—came to him as an ugly shock.

"Before you settle down in England, I would like you to see Arranstoun,—please promise me to come and stay there before you do? I will have a party whenever you like. I would love to show it to you—every part of it—especially the chapel—it is full of wonderful things!"

If she chose to give him reminders of aspects which hurt, he would do the same!

"It sounds most interesting," she agreed, but had not the courage to make any remarks about the chapel or ask what it contained.

The clock over the gateway struck twelve—and she laughingly started to walk very fast toward the house.

"Madame Imogen and Lord Fordyce will be ravenous —come, let us go quickly—I can even run!"

So they strode on together with the radiant faces of

Digitized by Google

those exalted by an exciting game, on the way passing Père Anselme.

And in the cool tapestried antechamber of the *salle-à-manger*, they found Henry looking from the window a little wistfully, and a pang of self-reproach struck both their hearts.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI

ALL through breakfast, Sabine devoted herself sedulously to Lord Fordyce—and this produced two results. It sent Henry into a seventh heaven and caused Michael to burn with jealous rage. Primitive instincts were a good deal taking possession of him—and he found it extremely difficult to keep up his rôle of disinterested friend. It must be admitted he was in really a very difficult position for any man, and it is not very easy to decide what he ought to have done short of telling Henry the truth at once—but this he found grew every moment more hard to do. It would mean that he would have to leave Héronac immediately. In any case, he must do this directly. Sabine admitted, even to him, that she was his wife. They could not together agree to leave Henry in ignorance, that would be deliberately deceiving, and would make them both feel too mean. But while nothing was even tacitly confessed, there seemed some straw for his honor to grasp; he clutched at it knowing its flimsy nature. He had given himself until the next day and now refused to look beyond that. Every moment Sabine was

Digitized by Google

attracting him more deeply—and bringing certain memories more vividly before him with maddening tantalization.

But did she love Henry? Of that he could not be sure. If she did, he certainly must divorce her at once. If she did not—why was she wishing to marry him? Henry was an awfully good fellow, far better than he—but after all, she was his wife—even though he had forfeited all right to call her so, and if she did not love Henry, no friendship toward him ought to be allowed to stand in the way of their reunion. It is astonishing how civilization controls nature! If we put as much force into the controlling of our own thoughts as we put into acting up to a standard of public behavior, what wonderful creatures we should become!

Here were these two human beings—young and strong and full of passion, playing each a part with an art as great as any displayed at the Comédie Française! And all for reasons suggested by civilization!—when nature would have solved the difficulty in the twinkling of an eye!

Michael spent a breakfast hour in purgatory. It was plain to be seen that Henry expected him to show some desire to go fishing, or to want some other sport which required solitude, or only the company of Madame Imogen—and his afternoon looked as if it were not going to be a thing of joy. The result of civilization then made him say:

Digitized by Google

"May I take out that boat I saw in the little harbor after breakfast, Mrs. Howard? I must have some real exercise. Two days in a motor is too much."

And his hostess graciously accorded him a permission, while her heart sank—at least she experienced that unpleasant physical sensation of heaviness somewhere in the diaphragm which poets have christened heart-sinking! She knew it was quite the right thing for him to have done,—and yet she wished fervently that they could have spent another hour like the one in the turret summer-house.

Henry was radiant—and as Michael went off through the postern and down to the little harbor where the boats lay, he asked in fine language what were his beloved's wishes for the afternoon?

Sabine felt pettish, she wanted to snap out that she did not care a single sou what they did, but she controlled herself and answered sweetly that she would take him all over the château and ask his opinion and advice about some further improvements she meant to make.

They strolled first to the crenellated wall of the courtyard along which there was a high walk from which you looked down upon the boat-house and the little jetty—this wall made the fourth side of the courtyard, and with the gate tower, and the concierge's tower across the causeway, and part of the garden elevation, was the very oldest of the whole château, and dated from early feudal times.

Digitized by Google

They leaned upon the stone and looked down at the sea.

"There are only a very few days in the year that Minne-ha-ha ever comes out of her shed," Sabine told him, pointing to the boat-house. "You cannot imagine what the wind is here—even now it may get up in a few moments on this glassy sea, or thunder may come—and in the autumn the storms are too glorious. I sit at one of the big windows in my sitting-room and watch the waves for hours; they break on the rocks which stretch out from the tower, which is my bedroom on the Finisterre side, and they rise mountain-high; it is a most splendid sight. We are, as it were, in the midst of a cauldron of boiling foam. It exalts and vitalizes me more than I can tell you. I wish it had been the autumn now."

"I don't," he said. "I much prefer the summer and peace. I want to take away all that desire for fierce things, dearest—they were the echoes of those dark thoughts and shadows which used to be in your eyes at Carlsbad."

"Ah, if you could!" she sighed.

It was the first time he had ever seen her moved—and it distressed him.

"Do you not think that I can, then?" he asked, tenderly. "It is the only thing I really want in life—to make you happy."

"How good you are, Henry!" she cried; "so noble and unselfish and true; you frighten me. I am just a

Digitized by Google

creature of earth—full of things you may not like when you know me better. I am sure I think of myself more than any one else—you make me—ashamed."

He took her hand and kissed it, while his fine gray eyes melted in worship.

"I will not even listen when you say such things—for me you are perfect—a pearl of great price."

"I must try to be, but I am not," and her voice trembled a little. "I believe I am as full of faults and life as your friend there—Mr. Arranstoun, who I am sure is just a selfish, reckless man!"

Michael at this moment reached the boat-house with old Berthe's son, who began to help him to untie the one he wanted. He looked the most splendid creature there in his white flannels—and he turned and waved to them and then got in and pulled out a few yards with long, easy strokes.

"Michael is a character," his friend said. "He has been spoilt all his life by women—and fortune. He has a most strange story. He married a girl about five years ago just to make himself safe from another woman whom he had been making love to. I was awfully angry with him at the time—I was staying in the house and I refused to wait for the wedding. I thought it such a shame to the girl, although it was merely an empty ceremony—but she was awfully young, I believe."

"How interesting!" and Sabine's voice was strained. "You saw the girl—what was she like?"

Digitized by Google

"No, I never saw her—it was all settled one afternoon when I was out—and I thought it such a thundering shame that I left that same night."

"And if you had stayed—you would have met her—how curious fate is sometimes—isn't it? Perhaps you could have prevented your friend being so foolish—if you had stayed."

"No, nothing in the world would ever prevent Michael from doing what he wanted to—it is in the blood of all those old border families—heredity again—they flourished by imposing their wills recklessly and snatching and fighting, and who ever survived was a strong man. It has come down to them in force and vigor and daring unto this day."

"But what happened about the marriage?" Sabine asked. "It interests me so much; it sounds so romantic at this matter-of-fact time."

"Nothing happened, except that they went through the ceremony and the girl left at once that same night, I believe, and Michael has never seen or heard of her since—he tells me the time is up now when he can divorce her for desertion, according to Scotch law—and I fancy he will. It is a ridiculous position for them both. He does not even know if she has not preferred some one else by now."

"Surely she would have given some sign if she had—but perhaps he does not care."

"Not much. I fancy he amused himself a good deal

Digitized by Google

at Ostende—" and Henry smiled. "He has been away in the wilds for five years and naturally has come back full of zest for civilization."

Sabine's full lips curled, and she looked at the sea again, and the figure in the boat rapidly pulling away from the shore.

"If he chose to leave her alone all these years, he could not expect anything else, could he, than that she would have grown to care for another man."

"No, that is what I told him—and he said he was a dog in the manger."

"He did not want her himself, and yet did not wish to give her to any one else—how disgustingly selfish!"

"Men are proverbially selfish," and Henry smiled again; "it is the nature of the creatures."

The violet eyes were glowing as stars might glow could they be angry—and their owner turned away from the sea with a fine shrug of her shoulders—her thoughts were raging. So that is how Michael looked upon the *affaire!* He was just the dog in the manger, and she was the hay! But never, never would she submit to that! She would speak to him when he came in and ask him to divorce her at once. Why should Henry ever know?—even if Scotch divorces were reported she would appear, not as Mrs. Howard, but as Mrs. Arranstoun,—then a discouraging thought came—only Sabine was such an uncommon name—if it were not for that he might never guess. But whether Henry ever

Digitized by Google

knew or did not know, the sooner she were free the better, and then she would marry him and adorn his great position in the world—and Michael would see her there, and how well she fulfilled her duties—so even yet she would be able to punish him as he deserved! Hay! Indeed! Never, never, never!

Then she knew she must have been answering at random some of Lord Fordyce's remarks, for a rather puzzled look was on his face.

A strong revulsion of feeling came to her. Henry suddenly appeared in his best guise—and a wave of tenderness for him swept over her. How kind and courteous and devoted he was—treating her always as his queen. She could be sure of homage here—and that far from being hay; she would be the most valued jewel in his crown of success. She would rise into spheres where she would be above the paltry emotions caused by a hateful man just because he had "it"!

So she gave her hand to Henry in a burst of exuberance and let him place it in his arm, and then lead her back into the château and through all the rooms, where they discussed blues and greens and stuffs and furniture and the lowering of this doorway and the heightening of that, and at last they drifted to the garden and to the lavender hedge—but she would not take him into the summer-house or again look out on the sea.

All through her sweetness there was a note of un-

Digitized by Google

rest—and Henry's fine senses told him so—and this left the one drop of bitterness in his otherwise blissful cup.

Michael meanwhile was expending his energy and his passion in swift movement in the boat—but after a while he rested on his oars and then he began to think.

There was no use in going on with the game after all—he ought to go away at once. If he stayed and saw her any more he would not be able to leave her at all. He knew he would only break his promise to Henry—tell Sabine that he had fallen madly in love with her—implore her again to forgive him for everything in the past and let them begin afresh. But he was faced with the horrible thought of the anguish to Henry—Henry, his old friend, who trusted him and who was ten times more worthy of this dear woman than he was himself.

He had never been so full of impotency and misery in his life—not even on that morning in June when he woke and found Sabine had left him—defied him and gone—after everything. Pure rage had come to his aid then—but now he had only remorse and longing—and anger with fate.

"It must all depend upon whether or no she loves Henry," he said to himself at last—"and this I will make her tell me this very afternoon."

But when he got back and went into the garden he happened to witness a scene.

Sabine—overcome by Lord Fordyce's goodness, had let him hold her arm while her head was perilously near

Digitized by Google

to his shoulder. It all looked very intimate and lover-like when seen from afar. The greatest pain Michael Arranstoun had ever experienced came into his heart, and without waiting a second he turned on his heel and went back to the house. Here he had a bath and changed his clothes, while his servant packed, and then, with the help of Madame Imogen, he looked up a train. Yes, there was a fast one which went to Paris from their nearest little town—he could just catch it by ordering Henry's motor—this he promptly did—and leaving the best excuses he could invent with Madame Imogen, he got in and departed a few minutes before his hostess and Lord Fordyce came back to tea at five.

He had written a short note to Sabine—which Nicholas handed to her.

She opened it with trembling fingers; this was all it was:

> I understand—and I will get the divorce as soon as the law will allow, and I will try to arrange that Henry need never know. I would like you just to have come to Arranstoun once more—perhaps I can persuade Henry to bring you there in the autumn.
>
> MICHAEL ARRANSTOUN.

It was as well that Lord Fordyce had gone up to his room—for the lady of Héronac grew white as death for a moment, and then crumpling the note in her hand she staggered up the old stone stairs to her great sitting-room.

Digitized by Google

So he had gone then—and they could have no explanation. But he had come out of the manger—and was going to let the other animal eat the hay.

This, however, was very poor comfort and brought no consolation on its wings. Civilization again won the game.

For she had to listen unconcernedly to Madame Imogen's voluble description of Michael's leaving—pressing business which he had mistaken the date about—finally she had to pour out tea and smile happily at Henry and Père Anselme.

But when she was at last alone, she flung herself down by the window seat and shook all over with sobs.

Michael's note to Henry was characteristic:

> I'm bored, my dear Henry—the picture of your bliss is not inspiriting—so I am off to Paris and thence home. I hope you'll think I behaved all right and played the game.
>
> Took your motor to catch train.
>
> Yrs.,
>
> M. A.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII

THE Père Anselme was uneasy. Very little escaped his observation, and he saw at tea that his much loved Dame d'Héronac was not herself. She had not been herself the night before at dinner either—there was more in the coming of these two Englishmen than met the eye. He had seen her with Michael in the morning in the summer-house from a corner of the garden, too, where he was having a heated argument with the gardener in chief, as well as when he met them on the causeway bridge. He felt it his duty to do something to smooth matters, but what he could not decide. Perhaps she would tell him about it on the morrow, when he met her as was his custom on days that were not saints' days interfered with by mass.

"I shall be at the gate at nine o'clock, *ma fille*," he said, when he wished her good-day. "With your permission, we must decide about the clematis trellis for the north wall without delay."

Henry accompanied the old man on his walk back to the village—and they conversed in cultivated and

Digitized by Google

stilted French of philosophy and of Breton fisher-folk, and of the strange, melancholy type they seemed to have.

"They look ever out to sea," the priest said; "they are watching the deep waters and are conscious forever of their own and loved ones' dangers—they are *de braves gens.*"

"It seems so wonderful that anything so young and full of life as Mrs. Howard should have been drawn to live in such an isolated place, does it not, *mon père?*" Henry asked. "It seems incongruous."

"When she came first she was very sad. She had cause for much sorrow, the dear child—and the sea was her mate; together she and I, with the sea, have studied many things. She deserves happiness, Monsieur, her soul is as pure and as generous as an angel's—if Monsieur knew what she does for my poor people and for all who come under her care!"

"It will be the endeavor of my life to make her happy, Father," and Lord Fordyce's voice was full of feeling.

"Happiness can only be secured in two ways, my son. Either it comes in the guise of peace, after the flames have burnt themselves out—or it comes through fusion of love at fever heat——"

"Yes?" Henry faltered, rather anxiously.

"When there are still some cinders alight—the peaceful happiness is not quite certain of fulfil-

Digitized by Google

ment; it becomes an experiment then with some risks."

"What makes you say this to me?"

The old priest did not look at him, but continued to gaze ahead.

"I have the welfare of our Dame d'Héronac very strongly at heart, Monsieur, as you can guess, and I am not altogether sure that the cinders are not still red. It would be well for you to ascertain whether this be so or not before you ask her to make fresh bonds."

"You think she still cares for her husband, then?" Henry was very pale.

"I do not know that she ever cared—but I do know that even his memory has power to disturb her. He must have been just such another as your friend, the Seigneur of Arranstoun. It is his presence which has reminded her of something of the past, since it cannot be he himself."

"No, of course it cannot be Michael—" and Henry laughed shortly. "He is an Englishman. She had never seen him before yesterday— You think she seems disturbed?"

"Yes."

"What would you have me do, then, Father? I love this woman more than my life and only desire her happiness."

The Curé of Héronac shrugged his high shoulders slightly.

Digitized by Google

"It is not for me to give advice to a man of the world —but had it been in the days when I was Gaston d'Héronac, of the Imperial Guard, I should have told you— Use your intelligence, search, investigate for yourself. Make her love you—leave nothing vague or to chance. As a priest, I must say that I find all divorces wrong—and that for me she should remain the wife of the other man."

"Even when the man is a drunkard or a lunatic, and there have been no children?" Henry demanded.

A strange look came in the old Curé's eye as he glanced at his companion covertly, and for a second it seemed as though he meant to speak his thought— but the only words which came were in Latin:

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder," and then he held out his thin, brown hand; they had reached his door.

"In all cases you have my good wishes, my son, for you seem worthy of her—my good wishes and my prayers."

Lord Fordyce mounted the stairs to his lady's sitting-room with lagging steps. The Père Anselme's advice had caused him to think deeply, and it was necessary that he had speech with Sabine, if she would let him come back into her sitting-room. He knocked at the door softly, as was his way, and when her voice said "*Entrez*" rather impatiently he did enter and advance with diffidence. She was sitting with her back to

Digitized by Google

the light in one of the great window embrasures, so that he could not see the expression upon her face—and her tone became gentle as she welcomed him.

"The evening is so glorious, come and watch the sunset; but there is a little look of thunder there in the far west—to-morrow we may have a storm."

Henry sat down beside her on the orange velvet seat—and his eyes, full of love and tenderness, sought her face beseechingly.

"I shall simply hate going the day after to-morrow, dearest," he said. "If it were not for the sternest duty to my mother, I would ask you to keep me until Friday—it will be such pain to tear myself away."

"You have been dear," she answered very low. "You have shown me what real love in a man means—what tenderness and courtesy can make of life. Henry—however wayward I may be, you will bear with me, will you not? I want to be good and happy—" Her sweet voice, with its faintly French accent, was full of pathos as a child's might be who is asking for comfort and sympathy for some threatened hurt. "Oh! I want to be in the sure shelter of your love always, so that storms like that one coming up over there cannot touch me. I want you to make me forget—everything."

He was so deeply moved, tears sprang to his eyes—as he bent and kissed her hands with reverence.

"My darling—you shall indeed be worshipped and protected and kept from all clouds—only first tell me,

Digitized by Google

Sabine, straight from your heart, do you really and truly desire to marry me? I do not ask you to tell me that you love me yet, because I know that you do not—but I want to know the truth. If you have a single doubt whether it is for your happiness, tell it to me—let there be no uncertainties between us—my dear love——"

She was silent for a moment, while his tenderness seemed to be pouring balm upon her troubled spirit.

"My God!" he cried, fearing her silence. "Sabine, speak to me—I will not hold you for a second if you would rather be free—if you think I cannot chase all sad memories away."

She put out her hand and touched his arm.

"If you will be content to take me, knowing that I have things to forget—and if you will help me to forget them, then I know that I want to marry you, Henry—just as to-night perhaps that little sail we see out there will long to get in to a safe port."

He gave her his promise—with passionately loving words, that he would protect and adore her always, and soothe and cherish her until all haunting memories were gone.

And for the first time since they had known one another, Sabine let him fold her in his arms.

But the lips which he pressed so fondly were cold, like death—and afterwards she went quickly to her room.

Digitized by Google

The die was irrevocably cast—she could never go back now; she was as firmly bound to Henry as if she had been already his wife.

For her nature was tender and honest and true—and Lord Fordyce had touched the highest chord in it, the chord of her soul.

But, as she stood looking from the narrow, deep casement up at the evening sky, suddenly, with terrible vividness, there came back to her mental vision the chapel at Arranstoun upon her wedding night, with its gorgeous splendors and the candles and the lilies and their strong scent, and it was as if she could feel Michael's kiss when the old clergyman's words were done.

She started forward with a little moan, and put her hands over her eyes. Then her will reasserted itself, and her firm lips closed tight.

Nothing should make her waver or alter her mind now—and these phantasies should be ruthlessly stamped out.

She sat down in an armchair, and forced herself to picture her life with Henry. It would be full of such great and interesting things, and he would be there to guide and protect her always and keep her from all regrets.

So presently she grew calm and comforted, and by the time she was dressed for dinner, she was even bright and gay, and made a most sweet and gracious mistress

Digitized by Google

of Héronac and of the heart of Henry Fordyce. Just as they were leaving the dining-room, Nicholas brought her a message from Père Anselme, to the effect that a very bad storm was coming up, and she must be sure to have the great iron shutters inside the lower dungeon windows securely closed. He had already told Berthe's son to take in the little boat.

And as they crossed the connecting passage, Madame Imogen gave a scream, for a vivid flash of lightning came in through the open windows—followed by a terrific crash of thunder, and when they reached the sitting-room the storm had indeed come.

It was past midnight when Michael reached Paris, and, going in to the Ritz, met Miss Daisy Van der Horn and a number of other friends just leaving after a merry dinner in a private room. They greeted him with fervor. Where had he been? And would not he dress quickly and come on to supper with them?

"Why, you look as glum as an owl, Michael Arrantoun!" Miss Van der Horn herself informed him. "Just you hustle and put on your evening things, and we'll make you feel a new man."

And with the most supreme insolence, before them all he bent down and kissed both her hands—while his blue eyes blazed with devilment as he answered:

"I will join you in half an hour—but if you pull me out of bed like this, you will have to make a night of it with me. You shan't go home at all!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII

A WHOLE month went by, and after the storm peace seemed to cover Héronac. Sabine gardened with Père Anselme, and listened to his kindly, shrewd common sense, and then they read poetry in the afternoons when tea was over. They read Béranger, François Villon, Victor Hugo, and every now and then they even dashed into de Musset!

The good Father felt more easy in his mind. After all, his impressions of Lord Fordyce's character had been very high, and he was not apt to make mistakes in people—perhaps le bon Dieu meant to make an exception in favor of the beloved Dame d'Héronac, and to find divorce a good thing! Sabine had heard from Mr. Parsons that the negotiations had commenced. It would be some time, though, before she could be free. She must formally refuse to return when the demand asking her to do so should come. This she was prepared to carry out. She firmly and determinedly banished all thought of Michael from her mind, and hardly ever went into the garden summer-house—because, when she did, she saw him too plainly standing there in his white

Digitized by Google

flannels, with the sprig of her lavender in his coat and his bold blue eyes looking up at her with their horribly powerful charm. The force of will can do such wonders that, as the days went on, the pain and unrest of her hours lessened in a great degree.

Every morning there came an adoring letter from Henry, in which he never said too much or too little, but everything that could excite her cultivated intelligence and refresh her soul. In all the after years of her life, whatever might befall her, these letters of Henry's would have a lasting influence upon her. They polished and moulded her taste; and put her on her mettle to answer them, and gradually they grew to be an absorbing interest. He selected the books she was to read, and sent her boxes of them. It had been agreed before he left that he would not return to Héronac for some time; but that in late October, when the Princess and Mr. Cloudwater got back to Paris, that if they could be persuaded to come to London, Sabine would accompany them, and make the acquaintance of Henry's mother and some of his family—who would be in ignorance of there being any tie between them, and the whole thing could be done casually and with good sense.

"I want my mother and my sisters to love you, darling," Henry wrote, "without a prejudiced eye. My mother would find you perfect, whatever you were like, if she knew that you were my choice—and for the same

Digitized by Google

reason my sisters would perhaps find fault with you; so I want you to make their conquest without any handicap."

Sabine, writing one of her long letters to Moravia in Italy, said:

> I am very happy, Morri. This calm Englishman is teaching me such a number of new aspects of life, and making me more determined than ever to be a very great lady in the future. We are so clever in our nation, and all the young vitality in us is so splendid, when it is directed and does not turn to nerves and fads. I am growing so much *finer*, my dear, under his guidance. You will know me when we meet—because each day I grow more to understand.

The Père Anselme had only one moment of doubt again, just the last morning before his Dame d'Héronac left for Paris when October had come. It was raining hard, and he found her in the great sitting-room with a legal-looking document in her hand. Her face was very pale, and lying on the writing-table beside her was an envelope directed and stamped.

It contained her refusal to return to her husband signed and sealed.

The old priest did not ask her any questions; he guessed, and sympathized.

But his lady was too restless to begin their reading, and stole from window to window looking out on the gray sea.

Digitized by Google

"I shall come here for six months in the year just as always, Father," she said at last. "I can never sever myself from Héronac."

"God forbid," exclaimed the priest, aghast. "If you left us, the sun no more would seem to shine."

"And sometimes I will come—alone—because there will be times, my Father, when I shall want to fight things out—alone."

The Père Anselme took some steps nearer her, and after a moment said, in a grave voice:

"Remember always, my daughter, that le bon Dieu settles things for us mortals if we leave it all to Him—but if we take the helm in the direction of our own affairs, it may be He will let circumstance draw us into rough waters. In that case, the only thing for us is to be true to our word and to our own souls—and to use common sense."

Sabine looked at him with somber, startled eyes.

"You mean, that I decided to help myself, Father—about the divorce—and that now I must look only to myself— It is a terrible thought."

"You are strong, my child; it may be that you were directed from above, I cannot say," and he shrugged his shoulders gently. "Only that the good God is always merciful. What you must be is true to yourself. *Pax vobiscum*," and he placed his hand upon her head.

But, for once, Sabine lost control of her emotions

Digitized by Google

and, bursting into a passion of tears, she rushed from the room.

"Alas! all is well?" said the priest, half aloud, and then he knelt by the window and prayed fervently—without telling his beads.

But, at breakfast, Sabine's eyes were dry again, and she seemed quite calm. She, too, had held communion with herself, and her will had once more resumed the mastery. This should be the last exhibition of weakness—and the last feeling of weakness; and as she would suppress the outward signs, so she would crush the inner emotion. All life looked smiling. She was young, healthy and rich. She had inspired the devoted love of a good and great man, whose position would give scope for her ambitions, whose intellect was a source of pleasure and joy to her, and whose tenderness would smooth all her path. What right had she to have even a crumpled rose leaf! None in the world.

She must get accustomed even to hearing of Michael, and perhaps to meeting him again face to face, since Henry was never to know—or, at least, not for years perhaps, when she had been so long happily married that the knowledge would create no jar. And at all events, he need not know—of the afterwards—that should remain forever locked in her heart. Then she resolutely turned to lighter thoughts—her clothes in Paris, the pleasure to see Moravia again—the excite-

Digitized by Google

ment of her trip to London, where she had never been, except to pass through that once long ago.

The Père Anselme came to the station with her, and as he closed the door of the reserved carriage she was in, he said:

"Blessings be upon your head, my child. And, whatever comes, may the good God direct you into peace."

Then he turned upon his heel, his black eyes dim—for the autumn months would be long with only Madame Imogen for companion, beside his flock—and the sea.

Michael had got back from Paris utterly disgusted with life, sick with himself. Bitterly resentful against fate for creating such a tangled skein, and dangling happiness in front of him only to snatch it away again. He went up to Arranstoun and tried to play his part in the rejoicings at his return. He opened the house, engaged a full staff of servants, and filled it with guests. He shot with frantic eagerness for one week, and then with indifference the next. Whatever he may have done wrong in his life, his punishment had come. He had naturally an iron will, and when he began to use it to calm his emotions, a better state of things might set in, but for the time being he was just drifting, and sorrow was his friend.

His suite at Arranstoun—which he had never seen since the day after his wedding, having gone up to Lon-

Digitized by Google

don that very next night, and from there made all his arrangements for the China trip—gave him a shock—he who had nerves of steel—and into the chapel he loathed to go. His one consolation was that Binko, now seven years old, had not transferred his affection to Alexander Armstrong, with whom he had spent the time; but after an hour or two had rapturously appeared to remember his master, and now never, if he could help it, left his side.

Michael took to reading books—no habit of his youth!—although his shrewd mind had not left him in the usual plight of blank ignorance, which is often the portion of a splendid, young athlete leaving Eton! But now he studied subjects seriously, and the whys and wherefores of things; and he grew rather to enjoy the evenings alone, between the goings and comings of his parties, when, buried in a huge chair before his log fire, with only Binko's snorts for company, he could pore over some volume of interest. He studied his family records, too, getting all sorts of interesting documents out of his muniment room.

What a fierce, brutal lot they had always been! No wonder the chapel had to be so gloriously filled—and then there came to his memory the one little window which was still plain, and how he had told Sabine that he supposed it had been left for him to garnish—as an expiatory offering—the race being so full of rapine and sin!

Digitized by Google

Should he put the gorgeous glass in now—it was time. But a glass window could not prevent the punishment—since it had already fallen upon him, nor even alleviate the suffering.

He was staring straight in front of him at the picture of Mary, Queen of Scots', landing—it had been painted at about 1850, when romantic subjects of that sort were in vogue, and "the fellow in the blue doublet" was said, by the artist, to represent the celebrated Arranstoun of that time. The one who had killed a Moreton and stolen his wife. No doubt that is why his grandfather had bought it. He thought it looked very well over the secret door, and then he deliberately let himself picture how it had once fallen forward, and all the circumstances which had followed in consequence. He reconstructed every word he could remember of his and Sabine's conversation that afternoon. He repictured her innocent baby face—and from there on to the night of the wedding. He reviewed all his emotions in the chapel, and the strange exaltation which was upon him then—and the mad fire which awoke in his blood with his first kiss or of her fresh young lips when the vows were said. Every minute incident was burned into his memory until the cutting of the cake—after that it seemed to be a chaos of wild passion, and moments of extraordinary bliss. He suddenly could almost see her little head there unresisting on his breast, all tears and terror at last hushed to rest by his fond

Digitized by Google

caresses—and then he started from his seat—the memory was too terribly sweet.

He had, of course, been the most frightful brute. Nothing could alter or redeem that fact; but when sleep came to them at length he had believed that he had made her forgive him, and that he could teach her to love him and have no regrets. Then the agony to wake and find her gone!

What made her go after all? How had she slipped from his arms without awakening him? If he had only heard her when she was stealing from the room, he could have reasoned with her, and even have again caught her and kissed her into obedience—but he had slept on.

He remembered all his emotions—rage at her daring to cross his will to begin with, and then the deep wound to his self-love. That is what had made him write the hard letter which forever put an end to their reunion.

"What a paltry, miserable, arrogant wretch I was then," he thought—"and how pitifully uncontrolled."

But all was now too late.

The next morning's post brought him a letter from Henry Fordyce, in which he told him he had been meaning to write to him ever since he had returned from France more than a month ago, but had been too occupied. The whole epistle breathed ecstatic happiness. He was utterly absorbed in his lady love, it was plain to be seen, and since his mind seemed so peaceful and

Digitized by Google

joyous, it was evident she must reciprocate. Well, Henry was worthy of her—but this in no way healed the hurt. Michael violently tore up the letter and bounded from his bed, passion boiling in him again. He wanted to slay something; he almost wished his friend had been an enemy that he could have gone out and fought with him and reseized his bride. What matter that she should be unwilling—the Arranstoun brides had often been unwilling. She had been unwilling before, and he had crushed her resistance, and even made her eventually show him some acquiescence and content. He could certainly do it again, and with more chance of success, since she was a woman now and not a child, and would better understand emotions of love.

He stood there shaking with passion. What should he do? What step should he take? Then Binko, who had emerged from his basket, gave a tiny half-bark—he wanted to express his sympathy and excitement. If his beloved master was transported with rage, it was evidently the moment for him to show some feeling also, and to go and seize by the throat man or beast who had caused this tumult.

His round, faithful, adoring eyes were upturned, and every fat wrinkle quivered with love and readiness to obey the smallest command, while he snorted and slobbered with emotion. Something about him touched Michael, and made him stoop and seize him in his arms

Digitized by Google

and roll the solid mass on the bed in rough, loving appreciation.

"You understand, old man!" he cried fondly. "You'd go for Henry or anyone—or hold her for me" —And then the passion died out of him, as the dog licked his hand. "But we have been brutes once too often, Binko, and now we'll have to pay the price. She belongs to Henry, who's behaved like a gentleman—not to us any more."

So he rang for his valet and went to his bath quietly, and thus ended the storm of that day.

And Henry Fordyce in London was awaiting the arrival of his well-beloved, who, with the Princess and Mr. Cloudwater, was due to be at the Ritz Hotel that evening, when they would dine all together and spend a time of delight.

And far away in Brittany, the Père Anselme read in his book of meditations:

> It is when the sky is clearest that the heaviest bolt falls—it would be well for all good Christians to be on the alert.

And chancing to look from his cottage window, he perceived that a heavy rain cloud had gathered over the Château of Héronac.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV

IN the morning before they left Héronac, Sabine's elderly maid, Simone, came to her with the face she always wore when her speech might contain any reference to the past. She had been with Sabine ever since the week after her marriage, and was a widow and a Parisian, with a kind and motherly heart.

"Will madame take the blue despatch-box with her as usual?" she asked.

Sabine hesitated for a second. She had never gone anywhere without it in all those five years—but now everything was changed. It might be wiser to leave it safely at Héronac. Then her eyes fell upon it, and a slight shudder came over her of the kind which people describe as "a goose walking over your grave."

No, she could not leave it behind.

"I will take it, Simone."

"As madame wishes," and the maid went on her way.

* * * * * * *

When Sabine had reached London late on that evening in the June of 1907 on her leaving Scotland she

Digitized by Google

found, in response to the wire she had sent him from Edinburgh, Mr. Parsons waiting for her at the station, his astonishment as great as his perturbation.

Her words had been few; her young mind had been firmly made up in the train coming south. No one should ever know that there had been any deviation from the original plan she had laid out for herself. With a force of will marvellous in one of her tender years, she had controlled her extreme emotion, and except that she looked very pale and seemed very determined and quiet, there were no traces of the furnace through which she had passed, in which had perished all her old conceptions of existence, although as yet she realized nothing but that she wanted to go away and to be free and forget her tremors, and presently join Moravia.

The marriage had been perfectly legal, as the certificate showed, and Mr. Parsons, whatever his personal feelings about the matter were, knew that he had not the smallest control over her—and was bound to hand over to her her money to do with as she pleased.

She merely told him the facts—that the marriage had been only an arrangement to this end—Mr. Arranstoun having agreed before the ceremony that this should be so—and that she wanted to engage a good maid and go over to Paris as soon as possible, to see her friend the Princess Torniloni.

She had decided in the train that her methods with

Digitized by Google

all who opposed her must be as they used to be with Sister Jeanne—a statement of her intentions, and then silence and no explanations. Sister Jeanne had given up all argument with her in her last year at the convent!

Mr. Parsons soon found that his words were falling upon deaf ears, and were perfectly useless. She had cut herself adrift from her aunt and uncle, whom she cordially disliked, leaving them a letter to tell them that as she was now her own mistress, she never meant to trouble them or Mr. Greenbank again, and she bid them adieu!

"It is not as if they had ever been the least kind to me," she did condescend to inform the lawyer. "They couldn't bear me really—Samuel, although he was such a poor creature, was far the best of them. Uncle was only wanting my money for him, and Aunt Jemima detested me, and only had me with her because Papa left in his will that she had to, or lose his legacy. You can't think what I've learned of their meannesses in the month I've know them!"

Thus Mr. Parsons had no further arguments to use —and felt that after seeing her safe to his own hotel that night, and helping to engage a suitable and responsible maid next day to travel with her, he could do no more.

The question of the name troubled him most, and he almost refused to agree that she should be known as Mrs. Howard.

Digitized by Google

"But I have told Mr. Arranstoun that I mean to be only that!" Sabine exclaimed, "and he didn't mind, and"—here her violet eyes flashed—"I *will not* be anything else—so there!"

Mr. Parsons shrugged his shoulders; she was impossible to deal with, and as he himself was obliged to return to America in the following week, he felt the only thing to do was to let her have her way. And so well did he guard his client's secret then and afterwards, that even Simone, though a shrewd Frenchwoman, had never known that her mistress' name was not really Howard. At the time of her being engaged she was just leaving an American lady from the far West whom Mr. Parsons knew of, and she was delighted to come as maid and almost chaperon to this sweet, but wilful young lady.

So they had gone to Paris together, to order clothes —such a joyous task—and to make herself forget those hours so terribly full of strange emotion was all which occupied Sabine's mind at this period. Other preoccupations came later; and it was then that she listened to Simone's suggestion of going to San Francisco. The maid knew it well, and there they spent several months in a quiet hotel. But they neither of them cared much to remember those days, and nothing would have ever induced Sabine to return thither.

* * * * * * *

She thought of these things now, as Simone left the

Digitized by Google

room with the blue case, but she put from her all disturbing remembrances on her journey to Paris, and rushed into Moravia's arms, who was waiting for her in her palatial apartment in the Avenue du Bois; they really loved one another, these two women, as few sisters do.

"Sabine, you darling!" the Princess cried, while Girolamo, kept up an hour later to welcome his godmamma, screamed with joy.

"Now tell me everything, everything, pet!" Moravia demanded, as she poured out the tea. "Has the divorce been settled? How soon will you be free? When can you get married to this nice Englishman?"

"I don't exactly know, Morri—the law is such a strange thing; however, my—husband—has agreed and begun to take the necessary steps by requesting me to go back to him, which I have refused to do."

"You are looking perfectly splendid, dear. Having all that brain stimulation evidently suits you. Wasn't the visit of Lord Fordyce delightful in that romantic old castle? What did you do all the time? and what was the friend like?—you did not tell me."

Sabine stirred her tea.

"He only stayed one night—he was quite a nice creature—Mr. Arranstoun."

"Of the castle?" The Princess was thrilled. "Why, darling, he must be the one that they say is going to marry Daisy Van der Horn. He has got some mat-

Digitized by Google

rimonial tangle like you have, and when he is through with it, Daisy is such dead nuts on him, they say she is certain to get him to marry her! Do tell me exactly what he is like—I am not over fond of Daisy, you know—but she is a splendid specimen of dash and vim."

"He is good-looking, Morri—and he has got 'it.'"

"I gathered that from all that I have heard of him here. Old Miss Buskin, Daisy's aunt, you remember the old horror, says he is 'just too sweet,' and 'that sassy'—yon know her frightfully vulgar way of speaking!—that even she is 'afraid to be alone in the room with him!'"

"I dare say—he—looked like that—he ought to suit Daisy," and then Sabine felt she had been spiteful and tried to divert matters by asking where Mr. Cloudwater was.

"Papa will be in in a moment. He has been dying for you to come back." But the Princess had not done with Mr. Arranstoun yet. The Van der Horn coterie had rung with his exploits on her return from Italy, and the lurid picture had interested her deeply.

"I do wish I had been at Héronac, Sabine, I would love to have seen that young man. Daisy's aunt told me he was wild about her niece, and at one moment she thought everything was settled—it must have been after he came back from Brittany—and then he went off to England—probably he does not like to speak out until he is free."

Digitized by Google

Sabine felt that strange sensation she had experienced once before, of hart sinking—and then, furious with herself, she mastered it and became more determined than ever to carry out her intention of growing accustomed to hearing of, and talking about Michael calmly.

"You are sure to meet him in England," she said; "he is a great friend of Henry's."

But afterwards, when she was alone resting in her cosy room before dinner, she deliberately pulled the blue despatch-box toward her and looked at some of its contents, while tears gathered in her eyes, which even the cynical thoughts which she was calling to her aid could not quite suppress. Would things have been different if she had been able to send Michael the letter which she had written to him in the September of 1907? The letter she had asked Mr. Parsons, who was again in London, to have delivered to him, into his hand—and which came back to her in Paris with the information from the old lawyer that Mr. Arranstoun had left England for the wilds of China and Tibet, and might not get any letters for more than a year. She remembered how that night she had cried herself to sleep with misery, and with a growing regret at having left Michael, and a pitiful longing just to be clasped once more in his strong arms and comforted. Oh! the hateful, wretched memories! To have gone off at once to China like that proved his callousness and indifference.

Digitized by Google

Then, in spite of herself, her thoughts would review all he had said to her on that morning in the garden. No —there had not been one word of meaning, not even any suggestion of regret that she was practically engaged to Henry. There had been some faint allusion to people being fools—and brutes when young, but not that they would wish to repair the faults which they had committed then. The whole thing was plain—he had never really cared an atom for her. He had been only affected by passion, even on her wedding night when he was pouring love vows into her startled ears.

"He was probably horribly surprised to come upon me at Héronac," her thoughts now ran, "and then just sampled me—and went off as soon as he could—back to Daisy in Paris!"

Here chagrin began to rise, and soon dried all her tears.

Yes! she hoped he would ask them to Arranstoun. She would certainly go, and try to punish him as much as she could by showing her absorption in Henry, and her complete indifference to himself. His vanity would be wounded, since he had owned to being a dog in the manger. That would be her only revenge—and what a paltry one! She felt that—and was ashamed of herself; but all human beings are paltry when their self-love is wounded and the passion of jealousy has them in its thrall, and Sabine was no better nor worse than any other woman probably. Once more she made reso-

Digitized by Google

lutions, firm resolutions to think no more of Michael either good or bad. It was perfectly sickening—the humiliation and degradation of his so frequently coming into her mind. She pulled the despatch-box nearer to her again, and in anger and contempt took from an envelope a brown and withered spray of flowers, which had once been stephanotis, and with forceful rage flung them into the fire.

"There! that is done with—ridiculous, hateful sentiment, go!"

And when she had shut the lid down with a snap, she rang for Simone and began to dress for dinner, an extra flush burning in her cheeks.

They crossed to England a week or so later, Lord Fordyce meeting them at Charing Cross, and going with them to the Hotel.

How dear he seemed, and how distinguished he looked! He was as ever a soothing and uplifting influence, and before the evening was over, Sabine felt calmed and happy, and sure she had done the right thing in deciding to link her life with his.

But it was not so with Moravia. Lord Fordyce had attracted her from the moment she had first seen him, and as things do during periods of time, unconsciously this feeling had simmered, and upon seeing him again had boiled up; and alas! Moravia—beautiful young widow and Princess—found herself extremely perturbed and excited, and undoubtedly becoming deeply inter-

Digitized by Google

ested in the declared lover of her friend. Henry for her had every charm. He was gentle and courteous, he was witty, and calm with that well-bred consciousness which she adored in Englishmen, and which Sabine had always said irritated her so.

It was all too exasperating because, with her unerring feminine instinct, she divined that Sabine really did not love him at all. If she had felt that she did, Moravia could have borne it better, but as it was fate was too hard, and when a week went by the Princess began actually to feel unhappy. They were continually surrounded with friends, and at every meal had the kind of parties that once she had taken such delight in. People were just beginning to come back to London, and they had amusing play dinners and what not, and all Henry's family, an intelligent and aristocratic band, had showered attention upon them. The Princess had very seldom been in London before—and quite understood that, but for the one particular cherry being out of reach which spoilt all her joy, she could have been, to use one of Miss Van der Horn's pet expressions, "terribly amused." Sabine, as the days wore on, and she was under Henry's influence again, lost her feeling of unrest and grew happy, and heard Michael's name without a tremor.

For Moravia dragged him into the conversation by saying how much she would like to meet him after all she had heard of him in Paris.

Digitized by Google

"I had a letter from him this morning," Lord Fordyce said. "He is shooting in Norfolk at this moment, but comes up to town on Friday night. I will ask him to dine then, Princess, and you shall see what you think of him. He really is a very charming fellow, for all his recklessness—and I expect half those enchanting tales they told you of him are overdrawn."

"Oh, I hope not!" Moravia laughed. "Do not disillusion me!"

Next day, Henry told them that he had wired to Mr. Arranstoun, who had wired back that he was very sorry he could not dine with them on Friday and go to a play, so Lord Fordyce promised the Princess he would find another occasion to present his friend.

To him, Henry, this week in late October had been one of almost unalloyed happiness—although he could have dispensed with the continuous parties; still, he felt the Princess had to be amused, and perhaps in a larger company he got more chance of speaking to his beloved alone.

The position of a man nearly always affects women—and the great and unmistakable prestige, which it was plain to be seen Henry possessed, had added to his charm in both Moravia and Sabine's eyes. It gratified Sabine's vanity. She knew this, she was quite cognizant of the fact that it pleased her. She felt glad and proud that she should occupy so exalted a place in the world's eyes, as she would do as his wife. Surely all the great

Digitized by Google

duties and interests of that position would make life very fair. It would be such peace and relief when the divorce proceedings would come on and be finished with —a much less tiresome affair in Scotland, she had heard, than in an English court.

When Michael Arranstoun got Henry's wire asking him to dine, he laughed bitterly. There was something so cynically entertaining in the idea of the whole situation! He was being asked out to meet the wife whom he was madly in love with, and was preparing to divorce for desertion, so that she might marry the giver of the invitation!

He was tempted to accept for a second or two, the desire to see her again was growing almost more than he could bear; but at this period he had still strength to refuse—and then, as the days went on, it seemed that nothing gave him any pleasure, and that constantly and incessantly his thoughts turned to one subject. If there had been no friendship or honor mixed up in the thing, nothing would have been simpler than to sit down and write to Henry telling him plainly that Sabine was his wife—and that she must choose between them. But then he remembered that, apart from all friendship, Sabine had already plainly expressed her choice, and that he had absolutely no right to hold her in any way since he had given her permission all those years ago to make what she chose of her life. He had not yet instructed his lawyers to begin actual proceedings—he

Digitized by Google

was in a furnace of indecision and unrest. He would like just somehow to get Sabine to Arranstoun first—then, if after that she still plainly showed that she loved Henry, he would make himself go ahead with the freedom scheme; but if he commenced actual proceedings now, by no possibility could she come to Arranstoun—and this idea—to get her to Arranstoun, began to be an obsession. Just in proportion as his nature was wild and rebellious, so the mad longing grew and grew in him to induce her to come once more into his house.

And it would seem that fate at first intended to assist him in this, for on the second of November the party went up North to stay with Rose Forster, Henry's sister, at Ebbsworth for a great ball she was giving for a newly married niece.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV

FOR a day or two, Michael Arranstoun could not make up his mind, when he heard of the Ebbsworth ball, as to whether or no he ought to go to it. He had several conversations with Binko upon the subject, and finally came to the conclusion that he would go. He had grown so desperately unhappy by this time, that he cared no more whether it were right or wrong—he must see Sabine. He had not believed that it could be possible for him to suffer to such a degree about a woman. He *must* satisfy himself absolutely as to the fact of her loving Henry.

Rose Forster had written, of course, to ask him to stay in the house for it—holding out the bait that she had two absolutely charming Americans coming. So Michael fell—and accepted, not without excusing himself to Binko as he finished writing out his wire:

Thousand thanks. I will come.

"I am a coward, Binko—I ought to have the pluck to go off to Timbuctoo and let Henry have a fair field —but I haven't and must be certain first."

Digitized by Google

They were all at tea in the library at Ebbsworth when he arrived, having motored over from Arranstoun after lunch.

Everyone was enchanted to see him, and greeted him with delight. He knew almost the whole twenty of them, most of whom were old friends.

The hostess took him over to the tea table, and sitting near it in a ravishing teagown was Moravia. Rose Forster introduced him casually, while she poured him out some tea.

The library was a big room with one or two tall screens, and from behind the furthest one there came a low, rippling laugh. The sound of it maddened Michael, and his bold blue eyes blazed as he began to talk to the Princess. His naturally easy manners made him able to carry on some kind of a conversation, but his whole attention was fixed upon the whereabouts of Sabine. She was with Henry, of course, behind that Spanish leather screen. He hardly even noticed that Moravia was a very pretty woman, most wonderfully dressed; but he felt she was a powerful unit in his game of getting Sabine to Arranstoun, and so he endeavored to make himself agreeable to her.

Presently, in the general move, Lord Fordyce and his lady love emerged with two other people they had been talking to, and Henry came up to Michael with outstretched hand.

Digitized by Google

He was awfully glad to see him, he said. Then this estranged husband and wife were face to face.

It was a wonderful moment for both of them, and with all the schooling that each one had been through, it was extremely difficult to behave naturally. Michael did not fight with himself, except to keep from all outward expression; he knew he was simply overcome with emotion; but Sabine continued to throw dust in her own eyes. The sudden wild beating of her heart she put down to every other reason but the true one. It was most wrong of Michael to have come to this party; but it was, of course, done out of bravado to show her that she did not matter to him at all—so with supreme sangfroid she greeted him casually, and then turned eyes of tenderness to Henry.

"You were going to show me the miniatures in the next room, Lord Fordyce—were you not?" she said, sweetly, and took a step on toward the door, leaving Michael with pain and rage for company.

She had never allowed Henry to kiss her since that one occasion at Héronac. It was not as it should be, she affirmed—until she were free and really engaged to him, she prayed him to behave always only as a friend. Lord Fordyce acquiesced, as he would have done to any penance she chose to impose upon him, and in his secret thoughts rather respected her for her decision; he was then more than delighted when she put her slender hand upon his arm with possessive famili-

Digitized by Google

arity as soon as they had reached the anteroom where the collection of miniatures were kept; but he did not know that she was aware that Michael stood where he could see them through the archway.

"My darling!" and he lifted the white fingers to his lips. Sabine had particularly beautiful hands, and they were his delight. She never wore any rings—only her wedding-ring and the one great pearl Henry had persuaded her to let him give her, but this was on her right hand.

"It would mean nothing for me to have it on the left one—while that bar of gold is there," she had told him. "I will only take it if you let me have it as a gage of friendship," and as ever he agreed. He was so passionately in love with her, there was nothing in the world he would not have done or left undone to please her. His eye followed her always with rapture, and her slightest wish was instantly obeyed. Sabine was naturally an autocrat, and, but for the great generosity of her spirit, might have made him suffer considerably, but she did not, being consistently gentle and sweet.

"My darling!" Henry repeated, in the little anteroom, while his fond eyes devoured her face. "Sometimes I love you so it frightens me—My God, if anything were to take you from me now, I do not think I could bear it."

Sabine shivered as she bent down to look at a case of Cosways in a show table.

Digitized by Google

"Nothing can take you from me, Henry—unless something goes wrong about the divorce. My lawyer arrives in England to-day from America on purpose to consult me and see what can be done to hasten matters. My—husband—has not as yet started the proceedings it seems."

Lord Fordyce's face paled.

"Does that mean anything sinister, dearest?" he demanded, with a quiver in his cultivated voice. "Sabine, you would tell me, would you not, if there were anything to fear?"

"I do not myself know what it means—I may have some news to-morrow—let us forget about it to-night. Oh! I want to be happy just for to-night, Henry!" and she held out her hand again pleadingly.

"Indeed, you shall be, darling," and splendid and unselfish gentleman that he was, he crushed down his anguish, and used all his clever brain to divert and entertain her, and presently all the women went up to dress for dinner and the ball, and Lord Fordyce found Michael in the smoking-room. He had really a deep affection for him; he had known him ever since he was an absolutely fearless, dare-devil little boy, the joy and pride of his father, Henry's old friend, and in spite of the full ten years' difference in their ages, they had ever been closest allies until their break at Arranstoun, and then Michael's five years abroad had made a gap, bridged over now since his return. Lord For-

Digitized by Google

dyce felt that Michael's intense vitality and radiating magnetism would be refreshing in the depressed state into which his lady love's words had thrown him, and he drew him over with him, and they sat down in two big chairs apart from the rest of the festive groups—some playing bridge or billiards. Michael was in no gentle temper, and Henry was the last person he wished to talk to. He knew he ought not to have come, he knew that he ought to tell Henry straight out and then go off before the ball. He felt he was behaving like the most despicable coward; and yet, if it were possible for Henry never to know that he, Michael, was Sabine's husband, it would save his friend much pain. He was smarting under Sabine's insolent dismissal of him, and burning with jealousy over that witnessed caress, the violent passions of his race were surging up and causing a devil of recklessness to show in his very handsome face. Lord Fordyce saw that something had disturbed him.

"What's up, Michael, old boy?" he asked. "I haven't seen you look so like Black James since you got Violet Hatfield's letter and did not see how you could get out of marrying her."

Black James was a famous Arranstoun of the Court of James IV of Scotland, whose exploits had been the terror and admiration of the whole country, and who was even yet a byword for recklessness and savagery.

Michael laughed.

Digitized by Google

"Poor old Violet!" he said. "She will soon be bringing out her daughter. I saw her the other day in London; she cut me dead!"

"That was an escape!" and Henry lit a cigar. "However, as you know, a year after weeping crocodile tears for poor Maurice, she married young Layard of Balmayn. So all's well that ends well. She and Rose have never spoken since the scene when Violet read in the *Scotsman* that you had got married!"

"Don't let's talk of it!" returned Mr. Arranstoun. "The whole thought of marriage and matrimony makes me sick!"

"Are you in some fresh scrape?" Henry exclaimed.

Michael put his head down doggedly, while his eyes flashed and he bit off the end of his cigar.

"Yes, the very devil of a hole—but this time no one can help me with advice or even sympathy; I must get out of the tangle myself."

"I am awfully sorry, old man."

"It is my own fault, that is what hurts the most."

"I do not feel particularly brilliant to-night either," Henry announced. "The divorce proceedings have not apparently been commenced in America—and nothing definite can be settled. I do not understand it quite. I always thought that out there the woman could always get matters manipulated for her, and get rid of the man when she wanted. They are so very chivalrous to women, American men, whatever may be

Digitized by Google

their other sins. This one must be an absolute swine."

"Yes—does Mrs. Howard feel it very much?" and Michael's deep voice vibrated strangely.

"She spoke of it just now. Her lawyer arrives from New York to-day to consult with her what is best next to be done."

"And she never told you a thing about the fellow, Henry? How very strange of her, isn't it?"

Lord Fordyce's fine, gray eyes gleamed.

"Ah—Michael, if you had ever loved a woman, you would know that when you really do, you desire to trust her to the uttermost. Sabine would tell me and offered to at once if I wished, but—it all upsets her so—I agree with her—it is much happier for both of us not to talk about it. Only if there seems to be some hitch I will get her to tell me, so that I may be able to help her. I have a fairly clear judgment generally—and may see some points she and Mr. Parsons have neglected."

Michael gazed into the fire—at this moment his worst enemy might have pitied him.

"Supposing anything were to go really wrong, Henry, it would cut you up awfully, eh?"

And if Lord Fordyce had not been so preoccupied with his own emotions, he would have seen an overanxiety on the face of his friend.

"I believe it would just end my life, Michael," he

Digitized by Google

answered, very low. "I am not a boy, you know, to get over it and begin again."

Mr. Arranstoun bounded from his chair.

"Nothing must be allowed to go wrong, then, old man," he exclaimed almost fiercely. "Don't you fret. But, by Jove, we will be late for dinner!" and afraid to trust himself to say another word, he turned to one of the groups near and at last got from the room. He did not go up to his own, but on into the front hall, and so out into the night. A brisk wind was blowing, and the moon, a young, frosty moon was bright. He knew the place well, and paced a stone terrace undisturbed. It was on the other side all was noise and bustle, where the large, built out ball-room stood.

An absolute decision must be come to. No more shilly-shallying—he had thrown the dice and lost and must pay the stakes. He would ask her to dance this night and then get speech with her alone—discuss what would be best to do to save Henry, and then on the morrow go and begin proceedings immediately.

Meanwhile, up in Moravia's room, Sabine was seated upon the white sheep's-skin rug before the fire; she was wildly excited and extremely unhappy.

The sight of Michael again had upset all her fancied indifference, and shaken her poise; and apart from this, the situation was grotesque and unseemly. She could no longer suffer it: she would tell Henry the whole truth to-morrow and ask him what she must do. His

Digitized by Google

love almost terrified her. What awful responsibility lay in her hand? But civilization commanded her to dress in her best, and go down and dance gaily and play her part in the world.

"Oh! what slaves we are, Morri!" she exclaimed, as though speaking her thoughts aloud, for the remark had nothing to do with what the Princess had said.

Moravia, who was lying on the sofa not in the best of moods either, answered gloomily:

"Yes, slaves—or savages. The truth is, we are nearly all animals more or less. Some are caught by wiles, and some are trapped, and some revel in being captured—and a few—a few are like me—they get away as a bird with a shot in its wing."

Sabine was startled—what was agitating her friend?

"But your troubles are over, Morri, darling—your wings are strong and free!"

"I said there was a shot in one of them."

Sabine came and sat upon a stool beside her, and took and caressed her hand.

"Something has hurt you, dearest," she cooed, rubbing Moravia's arm with her velvet cheek. "What is it?"

"No, I am not hurt—I am only cynical. I despise our sex—most of us are just primitive savages underneath at one time of our lives or another—we adore the strong man who captures us in spite of all our struggles!"

Digitized by Google

"Morri!"

"It is perfectly true! we all pass through it. In the beginning, when Girolamo devoured me with kisses and raged with jealousy, and one day almost beat me, I absolutely worshipped him; it was when he became polite —and then yawned that my misery began. You will go through it, Sabine, if you have not already done so. It seems we suffer all the time, because when that is over then we learn to appreciate gentleness and chivalry—and probably by then it is out of our reach."

"I don't believe anything is out of our reach if we want it enough," and Sabine closed her firm mouth.

"Then I wonder what you want, Sabine—because I know you do not really want Lord Fordyce—he represents chivalry—and I don't believe you are at that stage yet, dearest."

"What stage am I at, then, Morri?"

"The one when you want a master—you have mastered everything yourself up to now—but the moment will come to you—and then you will be fortunate, perhaps, if fate keeps the man away!"

Sabine's violet eyes grew black as night—and her little nostrils quivered.

"I know nothing of passions, Moravia," she cried, and threw out her arms. "I have only dreamed of them—imagined them. I am afraid of them—afraid to feel too much. Henry will be a haven of rest—the moment—can never come to me."

Digitized by Google

The Princess laughed a little bitterly.

"Then let us dress, darling, and go down and outshine all these dear, dowdy Englishwomen; and while you are sipping courtesy and gentleness with Lord Fordyce, I shall try to quaff gloriously attractive, aboriginal force with Mr. Arranstoun—but it would have been more suitable to our characters could we have changed partners. Now, run along!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI

ROSE FORSTER had felt she must not lure Mr. Arranstoun over to Ebbsworth on false pretences; he was a very much sought after young man, and since his return from the wilds had been very difficult to secure, and therefore it was her duty to give him one of her beautiful Americans at dinner. The Princess was obviously the destiny of her husband with her brother Henry upon the other side, so Michael must take in Mrs. Howard. Mr. Arranstoun was one of the last two guests to assemble in the great drawing-room where the party were collected, and did not hear of his good fortune until one minute before dinner was announced.

Sabine had perhaps never looked so well in her life. She had not her father's nation's love of splendid jewels, and wore none of any kind. Her French mother may have transmitted to her some wonderful strain of tastes which from earliest youth had seemed to guide her into selecting the most beautiful and becoming things without great knowledge. Her ugly frocks at the Convent had been a penance, and ever since she had been

Digitized by Google

free and rich her clothes and all her belongings had been marvels of distinction and simplicity.

Moravia was, strictly speaking, far more beautiful, but Sabine, as Henry had once said, had "it."

Her manner was just what it ought to have been, as she placed her hand upon her husband's arm—perfectly indifferent and gracious, and so they went in to dinner.

Michael had hardly hoped to have this chance and meant to make the most of it. At dinner before a ball was not the place to have a serious discussion about divorce, but was for lighter and more frivolous conversation, and he felt his partner would be no unskilled adversary with the foils.

"So you have got this far north, Mrs. Howard," he began by saying, making a slight pause over the name. "I wish I could persuade you to come over the border to Arranstoun; it is only thirty-five miles from here, and really merits your attention."

"I have heard it is a most interesting place," Sabine returned, suddenly experiencing the same wild delight in the game as she had done in the garden at Héronac. "Have you ghosts there? We do not have such things in France."

"Yes, there are a number of ghosts—but the most persistent and disconcerting one is a very young girl who nightly falls through a secret door into my room."

"How romantic! What is she like?" Two violet eyes

Digitized by Google

looked up at him full of that mischief which lies in the orbs of a kitten when it contemplates some fearsome crime, and has to appear especially innocent.

Michael thrilled. If she had that expression he was quite ready to follow the lead.

She is perfectly enchanting—shall I tell you exactly what she wears—and her every feature and the color of her eyes? The wraith so materializes that I can describe it as accurately as I could describe you sitting next me."

"Please do."

"She is about five foot seven tall—I mean she has grown as tall as that—when she first appeared she could not have been taller than five foot five."

"How strange!"

"Yes, isn't it—well, she has the most divine figure, quite slight and yet not scraggy—you know the kind, I loathe them scraggy!"

"I hate fat people."

"But she isn't fat. I tell you she is too sweet. She has a round baby face with the loveliest violet eyes in the world and such a skin!—like a velvet rose petal!" His unabashed regard penetrated Sabine who smiled slyly.

"You don't mean to say you can see all these material things in a ghost!" she cried with an enchanting air of incredulity.

"Perfectly—I have not half finished yet. I have not

Digitized by Google

told you about her mouth—it is very curved and full and awfully red—and there is the most adorable dimple up at one side of it, I am sure the people in the ghost world that she meets must awfully want to kiss it."

Sabine frowned. This was rather too intimate a description, but bashfulness or diffidence she knew were not among Mr. Arranstoun's qualities—or defects.

"I think I am tired of hearing what this ghost looks like, I want to know what does she do? Aren't you petrified with fright?"

"Not in the least," Michael told her, "but you will just have to hear about her hair—when it comes down it is like lovely bronze waves—and her little feet, too—they are exquisite enough in shoes and stockings, but without——!"

Here he had the grace to look at his fish which was just being handed.

A flush as pink as the pinkest rose came into Sabine's cheeks—he was perfectly disgraceful and this was of course in shocking taste—but when he glanced up again his attractive blue eyes had her late look of an innocent kitten's in them and he said in an angelic tone:

"She has not a fault, you may believe me, and she jumps up after the fall into the room, and sits in one of my big chairs!"

"Does she scold you for your sins as denizens of another sphere ought to do?" Mrs. Howard was constrained to ask.

Digitized by Google

"No—she is a little angel and always tells me that sins are forgiven."

"Does she come often?"

"Every single evening when I am alone—and—sometimes, she melts into my arms and stays with me all night. Binko— Ah!—you remember Binko!"— for Sabine's face had suddenly lit up—and at this passionate joy and emotion flooded Michael's and they both stopped dead short in their talk and Sabine took a quick breath that was almost a gasp.

"I remember—nothing," she said very fast, "how should I? The girl whose ghost you are speaking of ceased to exist five years ago—but I—recognize the portrait—I knew her in life—and she told me about the dog—he had fat paws and quantities of wrinkles, I think she said."

"Yes, that is Binko!" and his master beamed rapturously. "He is the most beautifully ugly bull-dog in the world, but the poor old boy is getting on, he is seven years old now. Would not you like to see him—again—I mean from what you have heard!"

"I love animals, especially dogs—but tell me, is he not afraid of the ghost?"

Michael drank some champagne, even under all his unhappiness he was greatly enjoying himself. "Not at all, he loves her to come as much as I do. She haunts—both my rooms—and the chapel, too—she wears a white dress and has some stephanotis in her hair—and

Digitized by Google

I am somehow compelled to enact a whole scene with her—there before the altar with all the candles blazing—and it seems as if I put a ring upon her hand—like the one you are wearing there—she has lovely hands."

The color began to die out of Sabine's cheeks and a strange look grew in her eyes. The footmen were removing the fish plates, but she was oblivious of that. Then the tones of Michael's voice changed and grew deeper.

"Soon all the vision fades into gloom, and the only thing I can see is that she is tearing my ring off and throwing it away into the darkness."

"And do you try to prevent her from doing this?" Sabine hardly spoke above a whisper, while she absently refused an entrée which was being handed. To talk of ghosts and such like things had been easy enough, but she had not bargained for him turning the conversation into one of serious meaning. She could not, however, prevent herself from continuing it, she had never been so interested in her life.

"No—I cannot do that—there is an archangel standing between."

At this moment Mrs. Howard's other neighbor claimed her attention; he was a man to whom she had been talking at tea, and who was already filled with admiration for her.

Michael had time for breathing space, and to con-

Digitized by Google

sider whether the course he was pursuing was wisdom or not. That it was madly exciting, he knew—but where was it leading to? What did she mean? Did she feel at all? or was she one of the clever coquettes of her nation, a more refined Daisy Van der Horn—just going to lead him on into showing his emotion for her, and then going to punish and humiliate him? He must put a firmer guard over himself, for propinquity and the night were exciting influence, and the cruel fact remained that it was too late in any case. Henry's words this afternoon had cast the die forever; he —Michael—could not for any personal happiness be so hideously cruel to his old friend. Better put a bullet through his own brain than that. Whatever should develop on this night, and he meant to continue the conversation as it should seem best to him, and if she fenced too daringly with him to take the button off the foils —but whatever should come of it it should not be allowed to alter his intention of to-morrow instructing his lawyers in Edinburgh to begin divorce proceedings at once. He was like a gambler who has lost his last stake, and who still means to take what joy of life he can before the black to-morrow dawns. So, in the ten minutes or so while Sabine had turned from him, he laid his plans. He would see how much he could make her feel. He would dance with her later and then say a final farewell. If she were hurt, too, he must not care—she had made the barrier of her own free will.

Digitized by Google

The person who was blameless and should not suffer was Henry. Then he began to look at Sabine furtively, and caught the outline of her sweet, averted head. How irresistibly attractive she was! The exact type he admired; not too intellectual-looking, just soft and round and babyish; there was one little curl on her snowy *nuque* that he longed to kiss there and then. What a time she was talking to the other man! He would not bear it!

And Sabine, while she apparently listened to her neighbor, had not the remotest idea of what he said. The whole of her being was thrilling with some strange and powerful emotion, which almost made her feel faint —she could not have swallowed a morsel of food, and simply played with her fork.

At the first possible pause, Michael addressed her again:

"Since you knew the lady in life who is now my ghost—and she told you of Binko—did she not say anything else about her visit to Arranstoun or its master?"

"Nothing—it was all apparently a blank horror, and she probably wanted to forget it and him."

"He made some kind of an impression upon her, then —good or bad, since she wanted to forget him—" eagerly.

Sabine admitted to herself that the umpires might have called "*touché*" for this.

Digitized by Google

"It would seem so," she allowed, with what she thought was generosity.

"That is better than only creating indifference."

"Yes—the indifference came later."

"One expected that; but there was a time, you have inferred, when she felt something. What was it? Can't you tell me?"

Excitement was rising high now in both of them, and the grouse on their plates remained almost untasted.

"At first, she did not know herself, I think; but afterwards, when she came to understand things, she felt resentment and hate, and it taught her to appreciate chivalry and gentleness."

Michael almost cried "*touché!*" aloud.

"He was an awful brute—the owner of Arranstoun, I suppose?"

"Yes—apparently—and one who broke a contract and rather glorified in the fact."

Michael laughed a little bitterly, as he answered:

"All men are brutes when the moment favors them, and when a woman is sufficiently attractive. We will admit that the owner of Arranstoun was a brute."

"He was a man who, I understand, lived only for himself and for his personal gratification," Mrs. Howard told him.

"Poor devil! He perhaps had not had much chance. You should be charitable!"

Sabine shrugged her shoulders in that engaging way

Digitized by Google

she had. She had hardly looked up again at Michael since the beginning, the exigencies of the dinner-table being excuse enough for not turning her head; but his eyes often devoured her fascinating, irregular profile to try and discover her real meaning, but without success.

"He was probably one of those people who are more or less like animals, and just live because they are alive," Sabine went on. "Who are educated because they happen to have been born in the upper classes—Who drink and eat and sport and game because it gives their senses pleasure so to do—but who see no further good in things."

"A low wretch!"

"Yes—more or less.

Michael's eyes were flashing now—and she did peep at him, when he said:

"But if the original of the ghost had stayed with him, she might have been able to change this base view of life—she could have elevated him."

Sabine shook her head.

"No, she was too young and too inexperienced, and he had broken all her ideals, absolutely stunned and annihilated her whole vista of the future. There was no other way but flight. She had to reconstruct her soul alone."

"You do not ask me what became of the owner of Arranstoun—or what he did with his life."

Digitized by Google

"I know he went to China—but the matter does not interest me. There he probably continued to live and to kill other things—to seize what he wanted and get some physical joy out of existence as usual."

A look of pain now quenched the fire.

"You are very cruel," he said.

"The owner of Arranstoun was very cruel."

"He knows it and is deeply repentant; but he was and is only a very ordinary man."

"No, a savage."

"A savage then, if you will—and one dangerous to provoke too far;" the fire blazed again. "And what do you suppose your friend learned in those five years of men—after she had ceased to exist as the owner of Arranstoun knew her?"

Sabine laughed, but there was no mirth in the sound.

"Of men! That they are like children, desiring only the toys that are out of reach, wasting their souls upon what they cannot obtain and valuing not at all the gifts of the gods which are in their own possession."

"What a cynical view!"

"Is it not a true one?"

"Perhaps—in some cases—in mine certainly; only I have generally managed to obtain what I wanted."

"Then it may be a new experience for you to find there was one thing which was out of your reach."

He bent forward eagerly and asked, with a catch in his breath:

Digitized by Google

"And that was——?"

"The soul of a woman—shall we say—that something which no brute force can touch."

The fencing bout was over, the foils were laid aside, and grim earnest was in Michael's voice now—modulated by civilization into that tone which does not carry beyond one's neighbor at a dinner party.

"Your soul—Sabine—that is the only thing which interests me, and I was never able to touch your soul? That is not true, as you know— How dare you say it to me. There was one moment——"

"Hush," she whispered, growing very white. "You must not—you shall not speak to me so. You had no right to come here. No right to talk to me at all—it is traitorous—we are both traitors to Lord Fordyce, who is a noble gentleman above suspecting us of such wiles."

And at that moment, through a gap in the flowers of the long table, they both saw Henry's gray eyes fixed upon them with a rather questioning surprise—and then Mrs. Forster gave the signal to the ladies, and Sabine with the others swept from the room, leaving Michael quivering with pain and emotion.

As for Sabine, she was trembling from head to foot.

During dinner, Moravia had had an interesting conversation with Henry. They had spoken of all sorts of things and eventually, toward the end of it, of Sabine.

Digitized by Google

"She is the strangest character, Lord Fordyce," Moravia said. "She is more like a boy than a girl in some ways. She absolutely rules everyone. When we were children, she and all the others used to call me the mother in our games, but it was really Sabine who settled everything. She was always the brigand captain. She got us into all the mischief of clandestine feasts and other rule breaking—and all the Sisters simply adored her, and the Mother Superior, too, and they used to let her off, no matter what she did, with not half our punishments. She was the wildest madcap you ever saw."

Henry was, of course, deeply interested.

"She is sufficiently grave and dignified now!" he responded in admiration, his worshiping eyes turned in Sabine's direction; but it was only when she moved in a certain way that he could see her, through the flowers. Michael he saw plainly all the time, and perceived that he was not boring himself.

"Her character, then, would seem to have been rather like my friend's, Michael Arranstoun's," he remarked. "They have both such an astonishing, penetrating vitality, one would almost know when either of them was in the room even if one could not see them."

"He is awfully good-looking and attractive, your friend," Moravia returned. "I have never seen such bold, devil-may-care blue eyes. I suppose women adore him; I personally have got over my interest in that

Digitized by Google

sort of man. I much prefer courteous and more diffident creatures."

Lord Fordyce smiled.

"Yes, I believe women spoil Michael terribly, and he is perfectly ruthless with them, too; but I understand that they like that sort of thing."

"Yes—most of them do. It is the simple demonstration of strength which allures them. You see, man was meant to be strong," and Moravia laughed softly, "wasn't he? He was not designed in the scheme of things to be a soft, silky-voiced creature like Cranley Beaton, for instance—talking gossip and handing teacups; he was just intended to be a fierce, great hunter, rushing round killing his food and capturing his mate; and women have remained such primitive unspoiled darlings, they can still be dominated by these lovely qualities—when they have a chance to see them. But, alas! half the men have become so awfully civilized, they haven't a scrap of this delightful, aboriginal force left!"

"I thought you said you personally preferred more diffident creatures," and Lord Fordyce smiled whimsically.

"So I do now—I said I had got over my interest in these savages—but, of course, I liked them once, as we all do. It is one of our fatal stages that we have to pass through, like snakes changing their skins; and it makes many of us during the time lay up for ourselves all sorts of regrets."

Digitized by Google

Henry sought eagerly through the flowers his loved's face. Had she, too, passed through this stage —or was it to come? He asked himself this question a little anxiously, and then he remembered the words of Père Anselme, and an unrest grew in his heart. The Princess saw that some shadow had gathered upon his brow, and guessed, since she knew that his thoughts in general turned that way, that it must be something to do with Sabine—so she said:

"Sabine and I have come through our happinesses, I trust, since Convent days—and what we must hope for now is an Indian summer."

Henry turned rather wistful eyes to her.

"An Indian summer!" he exclaimed. "A peaceful, beautiful warmth after the riotous joy of the real blazing June! Tell me about it?"

Moravia sighed softly.

"It is the land where the souls who have gone through the fire of pain live in peace and quiet happiness, content to glow a little before the frosts of age come to quench all passion and pleasure."

Henry looked down at the grapes on his plate.

"There is autumn afterwards," he reasoned, "which is full of richness and glorious fruit. May we not look forward to that? But yet I know that we all deceive ourselves and live in what may be only a fool's paradise"—and then it was that he caught sight of his adored, as she bent forward after her rebuke to Mi-

Digitized by Google

chael—and with a burst of feeling in his controlled voice, he cried: "But who would forego his fool's paradise!"—and then he took in the fact that some unusual current of emotion must have been passing between the two—and his heart gave a great bound of foreboding.

For the keenness of his perceptions and his honesty of judgment made him see that they were strangely suited to one another—his darling and his friend—so strong and vital and young.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII

THE ball was going splendidly and everyone seemed to be in wild form. Sabine had danced with an excitement in her veins which she could not control. Had there been no music or lights, she might just have felt frightfully disturbed and unhappy, but as it was she was only conscious of excitement. Lord Fordyce was above showing jealousy, and was content that she seemed to be enjoying herself, and did not appear unwilling to return to him quite frequently and walk about the room or sit down.

"You are looking so supremely bewitching, my darling," he told her. "I feel it is selfish of me to keep you away from the gay dances, you are so young and sweet. I want you to enjoy yourself. Have you not danced with Michael Arranstoun yet? I saw you were getting on with him splendidly at dinner—he used to be a great dancer before he went off to foreign parts."

"No, I have not spoken to him even," she answered, with what indifference she could.

"What was he saying just before you left the dining-room which made you look so haughty, dearest? He

Digitized by Google

was not impertinent to you, I hope," and Henry frowned a little at the thought.

Sabine played with her fan—she was feeling inexpressibly mean.

"No—not in the least—we were discussing someone we had both known—long ago—she is dead now. I may have been a little annoyed at what he said. Oh! is that a Scotch reel they are going to begin?"

How glad she was of this diversion! She knew she had been capricious with Lord Fordyce once or twice during the evening. She was greatly perturbed. Oh! Why had she not had the courage to be her usual, honest self, and have told him immediately at Héronac who her husband really was. She was in a false position, ashamed of her deceit and surrounded by a net-work of acted lies; and all through everything there was a passionate longing to speak to Michael again, and to be near him once more as at dinner. She had been conscious of everything that he did—of whom he had danced with—Moravia for several times—and now she knew that he was not in the ball-room.

Nothing could exceed Henry's gentleness and goodness to her. He watched her moods and put up with her caprices; that something unusual had disturbed her he felt, but what it could be he was unable to guess.

Sabine was aware that other women were envying her for the attention showered upon her by this much sought after man. She tried to assure herself how for-

Digitized by Google

tunate she was, and now got Henry to tell her once more of things about his home. It was in the fairest part of Kent, and they had often talked of the wonderful garden they would have in that fertile country sheltered from all wind, and she knew that as soon as the divorce was over, she and Moravia would go and stay there and look over it all, and meet his mother, which meeting had not yet been arranged. For some unknown reason nothing would induce her to go now.

"I would rather see it for the first time, Henry, when I am engaged to you. Now I should be an ordinary visitor—can't you understand?"

And he had said that he could. It always thrilled him when she appeared to take an interest in his home.

They talked now about it—and how he would so love her to choose her own rooms and have them arranged as she liked. Then he made pictures of their life together there, and as he spoke her heart seemed to sink and become heavier every moment, until at last she could bear no more.

It was about two dances before supper, into which she had promised to go with him. She would get away to her room now and be alone until then. She must pull herself together and act with common sense.

She told him that she had to settle her hair, which had become disarranged, and saying he would wait for her he left her at the foot of the smaller staircase, which led in a roundabout way to her and Moravia's rooms.

Digitized by Google

She had not wanted to pass through the great hall where quantities of people were sitting out. She was just crossing the corridor where the bachelors were lodged, when she almost ran into the arms of Michael Arranstoun.

He stopped short and apologized—and then he said:

"I was coming to find you—there is something I must say to you. Mrs. Forster's sitting-room is close here—will you come with me in there for a moment; we can be alone."

Sabine hesitated. She looked up at him, so tall and masterful and astonishingly handsome—and then she obeyed him meekly, and he led the way into a cosy little room unlit except for a glowing mass of coals.

Michael turned on one electric lamp, and they both went over to the chimney piece.

Intense excitement and emotion filled them, but while he tried to search her face with his passionate eyes, she looked into the fire with lowered head.

Then he spoke almost fiercely:

"I cannot try to guess what caused you to pretend you did not recognize me when we met at Héronac. That first false step has created all this hopeless tangle. I will not judge you, but only blame my own weakness in falling in with your plan." He clasped his hands together rather wildly. "I was so stunned with surprise to see you, and overcome with the knowledge that I had just given Henry my word of honor that I

Digitized by Google

would not interfere with him, or make love to the lady we were going to see—a Mrs. Howard, who was married to a ruffian of an American husband shut up in a madhouse or home for inebriates! My God! Lies from the very beginning," and he gave a little laugh. "I had forgotten for the moment that you had said you would call yourself by that name, but I remembered it afterwards. You had not decided if you would be a widow—do you recollect?—and you wanted a coronet for your handkerchiefs and note-paper!"

Sabine quivered under the lash of his scorn.

"You maddened me that afternoon and at dinner, too," he went on, "and I made resolutions and then broke them. But each time I did, I was filled with remorse and contrition about Henry—and I am ashamed to confess it, I was madly jealous, too. At last, I saw you in the garden together and knew I ought to go at once."

Here his voice broke a little, and he unclasped his hands. She raised her head defiantly now, and flashed back at him:

"I understand you had admitted to being a dog in the manger—you were always an animal of sorts!"

This told, he grew paler, and into his blue eyes there came a look of pain.

"You have a perfect right to say that to me if you choose; it is probably true. I am a very strong man with tremendous passions which have always been in my

Digitized by Google

race; but I am not altogether a brute—because, although I want you myself with more intensity than I have ever wanted anything in my life—I am going to give you up to Henry. I have been through hell—ever since I came from France. I have been weak, too, and could not face the final wrench—but I am determined at last to do what is straight, and to-morrow I will instruct my lawyers to begin proceedings, and I suppose in two months or less you will be free."

Sabine grew white and cold—her voice was hardly audible as she asked, looking up at him:

"What made you come here to-night?"

He took a step nearer to her, while he reclasped his hands, as though he feared that he might be tempted to touch her.

"I came—because I wanted to see you so that I could not stay away—I came because I wished to convince myself again that you loved Henry, so that there could be no shadow of uncertainty in what I intended to do."

"Well?"

"I saw that, whether you love him or not, you desire that I shall think that you do—and so at dinner I played for my own pleasure, the die being cast, for something else had occurred before dinner which makes it of no consequence to my decision whether you do or do not love him now. It is Henry's great love for you which is the factor, because to part from you he says would end his life. I could not commit the fright-

Digitized by Google

ful cruelty and dishonor of upsetting his plans, since you are originally to blame for concealing the truth from him, and I am to blame for abetting you. He trusts us both as you said."

Sabine was trembling; her whole fabric of peace and happiness in the future seemed to be falling to pieces like a pack of cards.

She could only look at Michael with piteous violet eyes out of which all the defiance had gone. Her slender figure swayed a little, and she leaned against the mantelpiece.

"My God!" he said, with a fresh clenching of his strong hands, "I would not have believed I could have suffered so. As it is the last time we shall ever talk to one another perhaps—I want you to know about things—to hear it all. I would like to ask you again to forgive me for long ago, but I suppose you feel that is past forgiveness?" His face had a look of pleading; then he went on as she did not respond. "If you had not left me, I would soon have made you forget that you had been angry, as I thought indeed I had already done when you seemed to be contented at least in my arms. But I would have caressed you into complete forgetfulness in time—" here his voice vibrated with a deep note of tenderness, which thrilled her—but yet she could not speak.

"And what had begun just in mad passion would have grown into real love between us—for we were made for

Digitized by Google

one another Sabine—did you never think of that?—just the same sort of natures—vigorous and all alive and passionate, with the same joy of life in our blood. We would have been supremely happy. But I was so frightfully arrogant in those days, and when I spoke I was deadly ashamed of myself, and then furious with you for daring to defy me and going after all. No one had ever disobeyed me. But it was shame really which made me agree to join Latimer Berkeley's expedition at once—the letter came by the early post. I wanted to get right away and try to forget what I had done—and since you had expressed your will, I just left you to stand by it." He leaned upon the mantelpiece now and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, how wrong I was! Because you were so young I should have known that you could not judge—and perhaps acted hastily in that sort of reaction which always comes to one after passion—and I should have followed you and brought you back."

His tones shook with anguish now. "Well, I am punished—and so all that is left for us to do is to say good-bye, my dear, and let us each go our ways. You, at least, are not suffering as I am—because you do not care."

A little sob came in Sabine's throat, and she could not reply. She could only take in the splendor of his figure and his grace as he leaned there with dark bent head. And so, in a silence that seemed to throb and

Digitized by Google

thrill, they stood near together for a few moments with hearts at breaking point.

Then he controlled himself; he must go at once or he could no longer answer for what he might do. She looked so sweet and sorrowful standing close to his side, her violet eyes lowered so that their long lashes made a shadow upon her dimpled cheek.

Intense magnetic attraction drew them nearer and nearer.

"Sabine!" he cried at last, hoarsely, as though the words were torn from his tortured heart. "There is something about you which tells me that you do not love Henry—that he has never made you feel—as I once made you feel, and could make you feel again." He stretched out his arms in pain. "The temptation is frightful—terrible—just to kiss you once more—Darling— Oh! I cannot bear it. I must go!" and he took a step away from her.

But *the Moment* for Sabine had come; she could resist its force no more, every nerve in her whole body was quivering—every unknown, though half-guessed emotion was stirring her soul. Her whole being seemed to be convulsed in one concentrated desire. The reality had materialized the echoes she had often dimly felt from that night of long ago.

The wild passion which she had feared, and only that very evening had repudiated as being an impos-

Digitized by Google

sible experience for her, had now overtaken her, and she could struggle no more.

"Michael!" she whispered breathlessly, and held out her arms.

With a cry of joy he clasped her to him in a fierce ecstasy. All the pent-up feelings in both their souls let loose at last.

It was a moment which caused time and place and all other things to be forgotten in a glory as great as though eternity had come.

"My darling, my darling!" he murmured, kissing her hair and brow and eyelids. "Oh! the hideous cruelty that it is all too late and this must be good-bye."

But Sabine clung to him half sobbing, telling him she could not bear it; he must not leave her now. And so they stood clasped together, trembling with love and misery.

"Darling," at last he besought her, while he unclasped her tender hands from round his neck. "Darling, do not tempt me—it is frightful pain, but I must keep my word. You had reason once to think that I was an uncontrollable brute, but you shall not be able to do so any more. I would never respect myself—or you—again if I let you make me faithless to Henry now. It is cruel sorrow, but we cannot think of ourselves; you know, we used too lightly for our own ends what should have been an awfully sacred tie. Do you remember, Sabine, we swore to God to love and be faithful forever

Digitized by Google

—not meaning a word we said—and now we are punished—" A great sob shook his deep voice.

"Darling child—I love you madly, madly, Sabine—dear little one—but you and I are just driftwood, floating down the tide—not like Henry, who is a splendid fellow of great use to England. It is impossible that his whole life should be ruined and sacrificed for our selfishness. Darling—" and he paused and drew her to him again fondly. "It is our own fault. We have left the situation develop through indecision and, I expect, wounded vanity and weakness—and now we must have strength to abide by our words. Henry isn't young like we are, you see. I honestly believe it would knock him right out if anything went wrong."

But Sabine clung to him still. She could think of nothing but that she loved him, and that he was her mate and her husband, and why must she be torn from his side for the happiness of any other man.

She was in an agony of grief. And then suddenly back to her came the words of Père Anselme, heavy as the stroke of doom. Yes, she had taken matters into her own hands and presumed to direct fate, and now all that she could do was to be true to herself and to her word. Michael was right; they must say good-bye. Henry must not be sacrificed.

She raised her pitiful face from his breast where it was buried, and he framed it in both his hands, and it

Digitized by Google

would have been difficult to recognize his bold eyes, so filled were they with tenderness and love.

"Sabine," he commanded, fondly, "tell me that, after all, you have forgiven me for making you stay that night. You know that we were perfectly happy at the end of it, and it will be such pain for me to have to remember all the rest of my life that you hold resentment. Darling, if only you had stayed! Oh! I would have cherished you and petted you," here he smoothed her hair, and murmured love words in her ear with his wonderful charm, until Sabine felt that neither heaven nor earth nor anything else mattered but only he.

"Sweetheart," he went on, "we have got to part in a moment, but I just must know if you love me a little in spite of everything. I *must know*, my darling little girl."

Then he held her to him again with immense tenderness, even in this moment of agonized parting exulting in the intoxication of love he saw that he had created in her eyes. There was no wile for the enslaving of a woman's heart that he was not master of. The question as to whether he ought to have employed them on this occasion is quite another matter, and not for our consideration! He was doing what he thought was the only honorable thing possible, giving up this glorious happiness, and he was merely a strong, passionate human being after all. They were going to part for the rest of their lives; he must make her tell him that she loved him, he wanted to hear her say the words.

Digitized by Google

"Sabine—little darling—answer me," he pleaded.

She flung her arms round his neck, her whole body vibrating with emotion.

"I love you absolutely, Michael," she cried, "and I have always forgiven you—I was mad to leave you, and I have longed often to go back. Oh! I would sooner be dead than not to be your wife."

They both were white now, the misery was so great. He knew he must go at once, or he could never go at all. They were too racked with present suffering to think what the future could contain, or of the growing agony of the long weary days and how they could ever bear them.

"My God, this is past endurance!" Michael exclaimed frantically. And after a wild embrace, he almost flung her from him. Then, as she staggered to a sofa she heard the door close, and knew that chapter of her life was done.

She sat there for a while gazing into the fire, too stunned with misery even to think; but presently everything came to her with merciless clearness. How small she had been all along! Instead of waiting until she heard the truth, she had let a wretched paragraph in a newspaper inflame her wounded vanity, so that she gave her promise to Henry there and then—putting the rope round her neck with her own hands. And afterwards, instead of being brave and true, wounded vanity again had caused her to tighten the knot. She remembered

Digitized by Google

Henry's words when he had implored her to tell him what were the actual wishes of her heart—and how she had cut off all retreat by her answer. She remembered all his goodness to her and how she had accepted it as her due, making him care for her more and more as each day came.

"I have been a hopeless coward," she moaned, "a paltry, vain, hopeless coward. I should have owned Michael was my husband immediately. Henry could have got over it then, and now we might be happy—but it is too late; there is nothing to be done——!"

Then she buried her face in her hands and sobbed brokenly. "Oh, my love, my love—and I did not even now tell you all."

The clock struck one—supper would be beginning and she must go down. If Michael could bear this agony and behave like a gentleman, she also must play her part with dignity. Henry would be waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

She went rapidly to her room and removed all traces of emotion, and then she returned to the hall by the way she had come.

"I was growing quite anxious, dearest," Lord Fordyce told her, as he advanced to meet her when she came down the stairs. "I feared you were ill, and was just coming to find you. Let us go straight in to supper now—you look rather pale. I must take care of you and give you some champagne," and

Digitized by Google

he placed her hand in his arm fondly and led her along.

They found chairs which had been kept for them at a centre table, near their hostess and Moravia, and here they sat down. Michael was nowhere in sight, but presently he came in with one of the house-party, and Mrs. Forster beckoned them to her—and thus it happened that he was again at Sabine's side. His eyes had a reckless, stony stare in them, and he confined his conversation to the lady he had taken in. And Henry, who was watching him, whispered to Sabine:

"He is often in some scrape, Michael—something must have culminated to-night. I have never seen him looking so haggard and pale."

Sabine drank down her glass of champagne; she thought she could no longer support the situation. She almost felt she hated Henry and his devotion,—it was paralyzing her, suffocating her—crushing her life. Michael never spoke to her—beyond a casual word—and at length they all went back to the ballroom, where an extra was being played—Michael, for a moment, standing by her side. Then a sudden madness came to them as their eyes met, and he held out his arm.

"This is my dance, I think, Mrs. Howard," he said with careless sangfroid, and he whirled her away into the middle of the room. They both were perfect dancers and never stopped in their wild career until the music ended. It was a two-step, and all the young people

Digitized by Google

clapped for the band to go on. So once more they started with the throng. They had not spoken a single word; it was a strange comfort to them just to be together—half anguish, half bliss—but as the last bars died away, Michael whispered in her ear:

"I am going to say good-night to Rose. She is accustomed to my ways. I have ordered my motor, and I am going home to-night—I cannot bear it another single minute. If I stayed until to-morrow I should break my word. I love you to absolute distraction— Good-bye," and without waiting for her to answer he left her close to Henry and turning was lost in the crowd.

Suddenly the whole room reeled to Sabine, the lights danced in her eyes, and a rushing sound came in her ears. She would have fallen forward only Lord Fordyce caught her arm, while he cried, in solicitous consternation:

"My dearest, you have danced too much. You feel faint—let me take you out of all this into the cool."

But Sabine pulled herself together and assured him she was all right—she had been giddy for a moment—he need not distress himself; and as they walked into the conservatory she protested vehemently that she had never been at so delightful a ball.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII

A SOBBING wind and a weeping rain beat round the walls of Arranstoun, and the great gray turrets and towers made a grim picture against the November sky, darkening toward late afternoon, as its master came through the postern gate and across the lawn to his private rooms. He had been tramping the moorland beyond the park without Binko or a gun, his thoughts too tempestuous to bear with even them. For the letter to Messrs. McDonald and Malden had gone, and the first act of the tragedy of his freedom had been begun.

It was a colossal price to pay for honor and friendship, but while they had been brigands and robbers for hundreds of years, the Arranstouns had not been dishonorable men, and had once or twice in their history done a great and generous thing.

Michael was not of the character which lauded itself, indeed he was never introspective nor thought of himself at all. He was just strong and living and breathing, his actions governed by an inherited sense of the fitness of things for a gentleman's code, which, unless it

Digitized by Google

was swamped, as on one occasion it had been by violent passion, very seldom led him wrong.

Now he determined never to look ahead or picture the blankness of his days as they must become with no hope of ever seeing Sabine. He supposed vaguely that the pain would grow less in time. He should have to play a lot of games, and take tremendous interest in his tenants and his property and perhaps presently go into Parliament. And if all that failed, he could make some expedition into the wilds again. He was too healthy and well-balanced to have even in this moment of deep suffering any morbid ideas.

When he had changed his soaking garments, he came back into his sitting-room and pulled Binko upon his knees. The dog and his fat wrinkles seemed some kind of comfort to him.

"She remembered you, Binko, old man," he said, caressing the creature's ears. "She is the sweetest little darling in all the world. You would have loved her soft brown hair and her round dimpled cheek. And she loves your master, Binko, just as he loves her; she has forgiven him for everything of long ago—and if she could, she would come back here, and live with us and make us divinely happy—as we believed she was going to do once when we were young."

And then he thought suddenly of Henry's home—the stately Elizabethan house amidst luxuriant, peaceful scenery—not grim and strong like Arranstoun—though

Digitized by Google

she preferred gaunt castles, evidently, since she had bought Héronac for her own. But the thought of Henry's home and her adorning it brought too intimate pictures to his imagination; they galled him so that at last he could not bear it and started to his feet.

It was possible to part from her and go away, but it was not possible to contemplate calmly the fact of her being the wife of another man. Material things came always more vividly to Michael than spiritual ones, and the vision he had conjured up was one of Sabine encircled by Henry's arms. This was unbearable—and before he was aware of it he found he was clenching his fists in rage, and that Binko was sitting on his haunches, blinking at him, with his head on one side in his endeavors to understand.

Michael pulled himself together and laughed bitterly aloud.

"I must just never think of it, old man," he told the dog, "or I shall go mad."

Then he sat down again. With what poignant regret he looked back upon his original going to China! If only he had stayed and gone after her, that next day, and seized her again, and brought her back here to this room—they would have had five years of happiness. She was sweeter now far than she had been then, and he could have watched her developing, instead of her coming to perfection all alone. That under these circumstances she might never have acquired that

Digitized by Google

polish of mind, and strange dignity and reserve of manner which was one of her greatest attractions, did not strike him—as it has been plainly said, he was not given to analysis in his judgment of things.

"I wish she had had a baby, Binko," he remarked, when once more seated in his chair. "Then she would have been obliged to return at once of her own accord."

Binko grunted and slobbered his acquiescence and sympathy, with his wise old fat head poked into his master's arm.

"You are trying to tell me that as I had gone off to China, she couldn't have done that in any case, you old scoundrel. And of course you are right. But she did not try to, you know. There was no letter from her among the hundreds which were waiting for me at Hong Kong—or here when I got back. She could have sent me a cable, and I would have returned like a shot from anywhere. But she did not want me then; she wanted to be free—and now, when she does, her hands are already tied. The whole cursed thing is her own fault, and that is what is the biggest pain, old dog."

Then his thoughts wandered back to their scene in Rose Forster's sitting-room—that was pleasure indeed! And he leaned back in his big chair and let himself dream. He could hear her words telling him that she loved him and could feel her soft lips pressed in passion to his own.

Digitized by Google

"My God! I can't bear it," he cried at last, once more clenching his hands.

* * * * * * *

And so it went on through days and nights of anguish, the aspects of the case repeating themselves in endless persistence, until with all his will and his strong health and love of sport and vigorous work, the agony of desire for Sabine grew into an obsession.

Whatever sins he had committed in his life, indeed his punishment had come.

Sabine, for her part, found the days not worth living. Nothing in life or nature stays at a standstill; if stagnation sets in, then death comes—and so it was that her emotions for Michael did not remain the same, but grew and augmented more and more as the certainty that they were parted for ever forced itself upon her brain.

They had not been back in London a day when Mr. Parsons announced to her that at last all was going well. Mr. Arranstoun had put the matter in train and soon she would be free. And, shrewd American that he was, he wondered why she should get so pale. The news did not appear to be such a very great pleasure to her after all! Her greatest concern seemed to be that he should arrange that there should be no notice of anything in the papers.

"I particularly do not wish Lord Fordyce ever to know that my name was Arranstoun," she said. "I

Digitized by Google

will pay anything if it is necessary to stop reports—and if such things are possible to do in this country?"

But Mr. Parsons could hold out no really encouraging hopes of this. No details would probably be known, but that Michael Arranstoun had married a Sabine Delburg and now divorced her would certainly be announced in the Scotch journals, where the Arranstouns and their Castle were of such interest to the public.

"If only I had been called Mary Smith!" Sabine almost moaned. "If Lord Fordyce sees this he must realize that, although he knows me as Sabine Howard, I was probably Sabine Delburg."

"I should think you had better inform his lordship yourself at once. There is no disgrace in the matter. Arranstoun is a very splendid name," Mr. Parsons ventured to remind her.

But Sabine shut her firm mouth. Not until it became absolutely necessary would she do this thing.

Henry's company now had no longer power to soothe her; she found herself crushing down sudden inclinations to be capricious to him or even unkind—and then she would feel full of remorse and regret when she saw the pain in his fond eyes. She was thankful that they were returning to Paris, and then she meant to go straight to Héronac, telling him he must see her no more until she was free. It was the month of the greatest storms there; it would suit her exactly and it was

Digitized by Google

her very own. She need not act for only Madame Imogen and Père Anselme. But when she thought of this latter a sensation of discomfort came. How could she read in peace with the dear old man, who was so keen and so subtle he would certainly divine that all was not well? And ever his sentence recurred to her: "Remember always, my daughter, that *le Bon Dieu* settles things for us mortals if we leave it all to Him, but if we take the helm in the direction of our own affairs, it may be that He will let circumstance draw us into rough waters." And then, that as she had taken the helm she must abide by her word. Bitterness and regret were her portion—in a far greater degree than after that other crisis of her life, when its realities had come to her, and she knew she must bear them alone. She had been too young then to understand half the possibilities of mental pain, and also there was no finality about anything—all might develop into sunshine again. Now she had the most cruel torture of all, the knowledge that she herself by her wilfulness and pride had pulled down the blinds and brought herself into darkness, and that there was not anything to be done.

Nothing could have been more unhappy than was the state of these two young people in their separate homes. In the old days when she used to try and banish the too lenient thoughts of Michael, she had always the picture of his selfishness and violent passion to call up

Digitized by Google

to her aid—but that was blotted out now, and in its place there was the memory that it was he, not she, who had behaved nobly and decided to sacrifice all happiness to be true to his friend. Sometimes when she first got back to Héronac she, too, allowed herself to dream of their good-bye, and the cruel sweetness of that brief moment of bliss, and she would go through strange thrills and quivers and stretch out her arms in the firelight and whisper his name aloud—"Michael—my dear love!"

She could not even bear the watching, affectionate eyes of Madame Imogen and sent her to Paris on a month's holiday. The Père Anselme had been away when she arrived, at the deathbed of an old sister at Versailles, so she was utterly alone in her grim castle, with only the waves.

The once looked-for letters from Henry were a dreaded tie now. She would have to answer them!—and as his grew more tender and loving, so hers unconsciously became more cold, with a note of bitterness in them sometimes of which she was unaware.

And Henry, in Paris with Moravia, wondered and grieved, and grew sick at heart as the days went on. He had let his political ambitions slide, and lingered there as being nearer his adored one, instead of going home.

Now love was playing his sad pranks with all of them, and the Princess Torniloni was receiving her

Digitized by Google

share. The constant companionship of Henry had not made her feelings more calm. She was really in love with him with all that was best and greatest in her sweet nature, and it was changing her every idea. She was even getting a little vicarious happiness out of being a sympathetic friend, and as he grew sad and restless, so she became more gentle and tender, and watched over him like a fond mother with a child. She would not look ahead or face the fact that he had grown too dear; she was living her Indian summer, she told herself, and would not see its end.

"How awfully good you are to me, Princess," he told her one afternoon, as they walked together in the bright frosty air about a week after Sabine had left them. "I never have known so kind a woman. You seem to think of gentle and sympathetic things to say before one even asks for your sympathy. How greatly I misjudged your nation before I knew you and Sabine!"

"No, I don't think you did misjudge us in general," she replied. "Lots of us are horrid when we are on the make, and those are the sorts you generally meet in England. We would not go there, you see, if it was not to get something. We can have everything material as good, if not better, in our own country, only we can't get your repose, or your atmosphere, and we are growing so much cleverer and richer every year that we hate to think there is something we can't

Digitized by Google

buy, and so we come over to England and set to work to grab it from you!"

"How delightful you are!"

"I am only echoing Sabine, who has all the quaint ideas. In that pretty young baby's head she thinks out evolution, and cause and effect, and heredity, and every sort of deep tiresome thing!"

"Have you heard from her to-day, Princess?" Henry's voice was a little anxious. She had not written to him.

"Yes."

"She seems to be in rather a queer mood. What has caused it, do you know, dear friend?"

"I have not the slightest idea—it has puzzled me, too," and Moravia's voice was perplexed. "Ever since the ball at your sister's she has been changed in some way. Had you any quarrel or—jar, or difference of opinion? Don't think I am asking from curiosity—I am really concerned."

Henry's distinguished face grew pinched-looking; it cut like a knife to have his vague unadmitted fears put into words.

"We had no discussions of any kind. She was particularly sweet, and spent nearly the whole evening with me, as you know. Is it something about her husband, do you think, which is troubling her? But it cannot be that, because in her letter of two days ago she said the proceedings had been started and she would be

Digitized by Google

free perhaps by Christmastime, as all was being hurried through."

Moravia gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Sabine is certainly very strange. Can you believe it? She has never mentioned the matter to me since we returned, and once when I spoke of it, she put the subject aside. She did not 'wish to remember it,' she said."

"It is evidently that, then, and we must have patience with the dear little girl. The husband must have been an unmitigated wretch to have left such a deep scar upon her life."

"But she never saw him from the day after she was married!" Moravia exclaimed; and then pulled herself up short, glancing at Henry furtively. What had Sabine told him? Probably no more than she had told her—she felt the subject was dangerous ground, and it would be wiser to avoid further discussion upon the matter. So she remarked casually:

"No, after all, I do not believe it has anything to do with the husband; it is just a mood. She has always had moods for years. I know she is looking forward awfully to our all going to her for Christmas. Then you will be able to clear away all your clouds."

But this conversation left Henry very troubled, and Père Anselme's words about the cinders still being red kept recurring to him with increasing pain.

Sabine had been at Héronac for ten days when the

Digitized by Google

old priest got back to his flock. It was toward the end of November, and the weather was one raging storm of rain and wind. The surf boiled round the base of the Castle and the waves rose as giant foes ready to attack. It comforted the mistress of it to stand upon the causeway bridge and get soaking wet—or to sit in one of the mullioned windows of her great sitting-room and watch the angry water thundering beneath. And here the Père Anselme found her on the morning after his return.

She rose quickly in gladness to meet him, and they sat down together again.

She spoke her sympathy for this bereavement which had caused his absence, but he said with grave peace:

"She is well, my sister—a martyr in life, she has paid her debt. I have no grief."

So they talked about the garden, and of the fisher-folk, and their winter needs. There had been a wreck of a fishing boat, and a wife and children would be hungry but for the kindness of their Dame d'Héronac.

Then there was a pause—not one of those calm, happy pauses of other days, when each one dreamed, but a pause wrought with unease. The curé's old black eyes had a questioning expression, and then he asked:

"And what is it, my daughter? Your heart is not at rest."

But Sabine could not answer him. Her long-con-

Digitized by Google

trolled anguish won the day and, as once before, she burst into a passion of tears.

The Père Anselme did not seek to comfort her; he knew women well—she would be calmer presently, and would tell him what her sorrow was. He only murmured some words in Latin and looked out on the sea.

Presently the sobs ceased and the Dame d'Héronac rose quickly and left the room; and when she had mastered her emotion, she came back again.

"My father," she said, sitting on a low stool at his knees, "I have been very foolish and very wicked—but I cannot talk about it. Let us begin to read."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX

QUEANWHILE the divorce affair went on apace. There was no defence, of course, and Michael's lawyers were clever and his own influence was great. So freedom would come before the end of term probably, if not early in the New Year, and Henry felt he might begin to ask his beloved one to name a date when he could call her his own, and endeavor to take every shadow from her life.

His letters all this month had been more than extra tender and devoted, each one showing that his whole desire was only for Sabine's welfare, and each one, as she read it, put a fresh stab into her heart and seemed like an extra fetter in the chain binding her to him.

She knew she was really the mainspring of his life and she could not, did not, dare to face what might be the consequence of her parting from him. Besides, the die was cast and she must have the courage to go through with it.

Mr. Parsons had let her know definitely that the bare fact of her name would appear in the papers, and noth-

Digitized by Google

ing more; and at first the thought came to her that if it had made no impression upon Henry's memory, when he must have read it originally in the notice of the marriage, why should it strike him now? But this was too slender a thread to hang hope upon, and it would be wiser and better for them all if when Lord Fordyce came with Moravia and Girolamo and Mr. Cloudwater at Christmas, she told him the whole truth. The dread of this augmented day by day, until it became a nightmare and she had to use the whole force of her will to keep even an outward semblance of calm.

Thoughts of Michael she dismissed as well as she could, but she had passionate longings to go and take out the blue enamel locket from her despatch-box and look at it once more; she would not permit herself to indulge in this weakness, though. Her whole days were ruled with sternest discipline until she became quite thin, and the Père Anselme grew worried about her.

A fortnight went by; it was growing near to Christmastime—but the atmosphere of Héronac contained no peace, and one bleak afternoon the old priest paced the long walk in the garden with knitted brows. He did not feel altogether sure as to what was his duty. He was always on the side of leaving things in the hand of the good God, but it might be that he would be selected to be an instrument of fate, since he seemed the only detached person with any authority in the affair.

His Dame d'Héronac had tried hard to be natural

Digitized by Google

and her old self, he could see that, but her taste in their reading had been over much directed to Heine, she having brought French translations of this poet's works back with her from Paris.

Twice also had she asked him to recite to her De Musset's "*La Nuit de Décembre.*" He did not consider these as satisfactory symptoms. There was no question in his astute mind as to what was the general cause of his beloved lady's unrest. The change in her had begun to take place ever since the fatal visit of the two Englishmen. Herein lay matter for thought. For the very morning before their arrival she had been particularly bright and gay, telling him of her intended action in making arrangements to free herself from her empty marriage bonds, and apparently contemplating a new life with Lord Fordyce with satisfaction. Père Anselme was a great student of Voltaire and looked upon his tale of "Zadig" as one from which much benefit could be derived. And now he began to put the method of this citizen of Babylon into practice, never having heard of the immortal Sherlock Holmes.

The end of his cogitations directed upon this principle brought him two concrete facts.

Number one: That Sabine had been deeply affected by the presence of the second Englishman—the handsome and vital young man—and number two: That she was now certainly regretting that she was going to obtain her divorce. Further use of Zadig's deductive

Digitized by Google

method produced the conviction that, as an abstract young man would be equally out of reach were she still bound to her husband—or married to Lord Fordyce—and could only be obtained were she divorced—some other reason for her distaste and evident depression about this latter state coming to her must be looked for, and could only be found in the supposition that the Seigneur of Arranstoun might be himself her husband! Why, then, this mystery? Why had not he and she told the truth? Zadig's counsel could not help him to unravel this point, and he continued to pace the walk with impatient sighs.

He was even more of a gentleman than of a priest, and therefore forbore to question Sabine directly, but that afternoon, with the intention of directing her mind into facing eventualities, he had talked of Lord Fordyce, and what would be the duties of her future position as his wife. Sabine replied without enthusiasm in her tones, while her words gave a picture of all that any woman's heart could desire:

"He is a very fine character, it would seem," the Père Anselme said. "And he loves you with a deep devotion."

Sabine clasped her hands suddenly, as though the thought gave her physical pain.

"He loves me too much, Father; no woman should be loved like that; it fills her with fear."

"Fear of what?"

Digitized by Google

"Fear of failing to come up to the standard of his ideal of her—fear of breaking his heart."

"I told him in the beginning it were wiser to be certain all cinders were cold before embarking upon fresh ties," Père Anselme remarked meditatively, "and he assured me that he would ascertain facts, and whether or no you felt he could make you happy."

"And he did," Sabine's voice was strained. "And I told him that he could—if he would help me to forget—and I gave him my word and let him—kiss me, Father—so I am bound to him irrevocably, as you can see."

"It would seem so."

There was a pause, and then the priest got up and held his thin brown hands to the blaze, his eyes averted from her while he spoke.

"You must look to the end, my daughter, and ask yourself whether or no you will be strong enough to play your part in the years which are coming—since, from what I can judge, the embers are not yet cold. Temptation will arm for you with increasing strength. What then?"

"I do—not know," Sabine whispered hardly aloud.

"It will be necessary to be quite sure, my daughter, before you again make vows."

And then he turned the conversation abruptly, which was his way when he intended what he had said to sink deeply into the heart of his listener.

Digitized by Google

But just as he was leaving after tea he drew the heavy curtains back from one of the great windows. All was inky darkness, and the roaring of the sea with its breakers foaming beneath them, came up like the menacing voices of an angry crowd.

"The good God can calm even this rough water," he said. "It would be well that you ask for guidance, my child, and when it has come to you, hesitate no more."

Then, making his sign of blessing, he rapidly strode to the door, leaving the Dame d'Héronac crouched upon the velvet window-seat, peering out upon the waves.

And Michael, numb with misery and regret, was deciding to go to Paris for Christmas. The memories at Arranstoun he could not endure.

The great suffering that he was going through was having some effect upon his mind, refining him in all ways, forcing him to think and to reason out all problems of life. The great dreams which used to come to him sometimes when in Kashmire during solitary hours of watching for sport returned. He would surely do something vast with his life—when this awful pain should be past. What, he could not decide—but something which would take him out of himself. He did not think he could stay in England just at first after Sabine should have married Henry—the chances of running across her would be too great, since they both knew the same people.

Digitized by Google

Henry would read about the divorce and the name "Sabine Delburg" in the paper, too, and would then know everything, even if Sabine had not already informed him. But he almost thought she must have done so, because he had had no word lately from his old friend. Thus the time went on for all of them, and none but the priest felt any premonition that Christmas would certainly bring a climax in all of their fates.

Lord Fordyce had hardly ever spent this season away from his mother, who was a very old lady now, and deeply devoted to him; but the imperative desire to be near his adored overcame any other feeling, and he, with the Princess and her son and father, was due to arrive at Héronac on the day before Christmas Eve.

He ran across Michael at the Ritz the night before he left Paris. They were both dining with parties, and nodded across the room, and then afterwards in the hall had a few words.

"To-morrow I am going down to Héronac, Michael," Henry said. "Where do you intend to spend the festive season? Here, I suppose?"

"Yes, it is as good as anywhere," Michael returned. "I felt I could not stand the whole thing at Arranstoun. I have been away from England so long, I must get used to these old anniversaries again gradually. Here one is free."

They looked into each other's faces and Henry noticed that Michael had not quite got his old exuberant

Digitized by Google

expression of the vivid joy of life—he was paler and even a little haggard, if so splendid a creature could look that!

"I suppose he has been going the pace over here," Henry thought, and wondered why Michael's manner should be a little constrained. Then they shook hands with their usual cordiality and said good-night. And Michael prepared to go on to a supper party, with a feeling of wild rebellion in his heart. The sight of his old friend and the knowledge that he was on his way to join Sabine drove him almost mad again.

"I suppose they will be formally engaged in the New Year. I wonder how my little girl is bearing it—if she is half as miserable as I am, God comfort her," he cried to himself; and then he felt he could not stand Miss Daisy Van der Horn, and getting into his motor he told the chauffeur to drive into the Bois instead of to the supper.

Here among the dark trees he could think. It was all perfectly impossible, and no happiness could possibly come to Henry either—unless he succeeded in consoling Sabine when she should be his wife. And this was perhaps the bitterest thought of all—that she should ever be consoled as Henry's wife!

Then the extreme strangeness of Henry's still being in ignorance of his and Sabine's relations struck him. She had evidently not yet had the courage to tell the truth, and so the thing would come as a shock—and

Digitized by Google

what would happen then? Who could say? In any case, Henry could not feel he had not come up to the scratch. Would Sabine ever tell Henry the whole story? He felt sure she would not. But how could things be expected to go on with the years? It was all unthinkable now that it had come so close.

It was about five o'clock on the next afternoon that the Princess and her party arrived at Héronac. Sabine was waiting for them in the great hall, and greeted them with feverish delight, but Henry's worshipping eyes took in at once the fact that she was greatly changed. She made a tremendous fuss over Girolamo, for whom a most sumptuous tea had been prepared in his own nurseries, and Henry thought how sweet she was with children and how divinely happy they would be in the future, when they had some of their own!

But what had altered his beloved? Her face had lost its baby outline, it seemed, and her violet eyes were full of deeper shadows than even they had been in the first few days of their acquaintance at Carlsbad. He must find all this out for himself directly they could be alone.

This chance, however, did not seem likely to be vouchsafed to him, for on the plea of having "such heaps to talk over with Moravia, Sabine accompanied that lady to her room and did not appear again until they were all assembled in the big *salon* for dinner,

Digitized by Google

where Madame Imogen, who had returned the day before, was doing her best to add to the gaiety of the party by her jolly remarks.

The lady of Héronac had hardly been able to control herself as she waited for her guests' arrival and felt that to rush at Girolamo would be her only hope. For that morning the post had brought the news that the divorce would be granted by the end of January, and she would be free! She had felt very faint as she had read Mr. Parsons' letter. No matter how one might be expecting an axe to fall, when it does, the shock must seem immense.

Sabine lay there and moaned in her bed. Then over her crept a fierce resentment against Henry. Why should she be sacrificed to him? He was forty years old, and had lived his life; and she was young, and had not yet really begun to enjoy her's. How would she be able to bear it; or to act even complaisance when every fiber of her being was turning in mad passion and desire to Michael, her love?

Then her sense of justice resumed its sway. Henry at least was not to blame—no one was to blame but her own self. And as she had proudly agreed with Michael that every one must come up to the scratch, she must fulfil her part. There was no use in being dramatic and deciding upon a certain course as being a noble and disinterested one, and then in not having the pluck to carry it through. She had prayed for guidance in-

Digitized by Google

deed, and no light had come, beyond the feeling that she must stick to her word.

The report of the case would be in the Scotch papers, and Michael Arranstoun being such a person of consequence it would probably be just announced in the English journals, too, and Henry would see it. She could delay no longer; he must be told the truth in the next few days.

The sight of his kind, distinguished face shining with love had unnerved her. She must tell him with all seeming indifference, and then close the scene as quickly as she could.

While Sabine and Moravia talked in the latter's room, Moravia was full of discomfort and anxiety. Her much loved friend appeared so strange. She seemed to speak feverishly, as it were, to be trying to keep the conversation upon the lightest subjects; and when Moravia asked her how the divorce was going, she put the question aside and said that they would speak of tiresome things like that when Christmas was over!

"But," explained the Princess, "I don't call it at all tiresome. It means your freedom, Sabine, and then you will be able to marry Henry. He absolutely worships the ground you tread on, and if anything had gone wrong, I think it would have simply killed him quite."

"Yes, I know," returned Sabine. "That thought is with me day and night."

"What do you mean, darling?"

Digitized by Google

"'He is often in some scrape—something must have culminated to-night'"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"I mean that Henry's love frightens me, Morri. How shall I ever be able to live up to being the ideal creature he thinks that I am?" and Sabine gave a forced laugh.

"You are not a bad sort, you know," the Princess told her. "A man would be very hard to please if he was not quite satisfied with you!"

Moravia's own pain about the whole thing never clouded her sense of justice. Henry's love for her friend had been manifest from the very beginning, so she had never had any illusions or doubt about it; and if she had been so weak and foolish as to allow herself to fall in love with him, she must bear it and not be mean. Sabine certainly was not to blame.

"I—hope I shall satisfy him," Sabine sighed; "but I do not know. What does satisfy a man? Tell me, Moravia—you who understand them."

"It depends upon the man," and the Princess looked thoughtful. "I know now that if I had been clever I could have satisfied Girolamo for ages, by appearing to be always just a little out of his reach, so as to keep his hunting instinct alive. When a man is a very strong, passionate creature like that, it is the only way—make him scheme to get you to be lovely to him, make him wait, and never be sure if you are going to let him kiss you or no; and if you adore him really yourself, *hide it*, and let him feel always that he has to use his wits and all his charms to keep you. Oh! I could

Digitized by Google

have been so happy if I had known these things in time!"

"Yes, Morri, but Henry is not—like that. How must I satisfy him?"

Moravia lay back in her chair and discoursed meditatively.

"It is only the very noblest natures in men that women can be perfectly frank with, and as good and kind and tender as they feel they would like to be. Lord Fordyce is one of these. You could load him with devotion and love, and he would never take advantage of you; but just to satisfy him, Sabine, you need only be you, I expect!" and she looked fondly at her friend. "Though, darling, I tell you, if you were too nice to him, even he might turn upon you some day, probably. No woman can afford to be really devoted to a man; they can't help being mean, and immediately thinking the poor thing is of less consequence to please than some capricious cat they cannot obtain!"

Sabine nodded, and Moravia went on: "But you need not fear! Henry will adore you always—because you really don't care!" and she sighed a little bitterly at the contrariness of things.

"It is good not to care, then?"

"Yes, I think so; for happiness in a home, the woman ought always to love a little the less."

"Well, we shall be very happy, then," and Sabine echoed Moravia's sigh, but much more bitterly.

Digitized by Google

"You will be good to him, dearest?" Moravia asked rather anxiously. "He is the grandest character I have ever met in my life."

"Yes, I will be good to him."

"Just think!" Moravia, who had domestic instincts, now went on, in spite of the personal anguish she was feeling about her own love for Henry. "You may have the happiness soon of being the mother of a lovely little son like Girolamo!" and she gave a great sigh as she looked into the fire.

Sabine stiffened all over, and an expression of horrified repugnance and dismay grew in her face, and she drew her breath in with a little gasp. She had not faced this thought before, and she could not bear it now, and got up quickly, saying she must go off and dress or she would be late for dinner.

Moravia looked after her, full of wonder and foreboding for Henry. What happiness could he expect if the woman he adored felt like that!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX

CHRISTMAS eve was particularly frosty and bright. The sun poured through Sabine's windows high up when she woke, but her heart was heavy as lead. She had not had a single word alone with Henry the night before, and knew the dreaded *tête-à-tête* must come. She did not set herself to tell him who her husband was on this particular morning—about that she must be guided by events—but she could not make barriers between them, and must allow him to come to her sitting-room. He did, about half-past ten o'clock, his face full of radiance and love. She had always steadfastly refused to take any presents from him, but he had had the most beautiful flowers sent from Paris for her, and they had just arrived. She was taking them out of their box herself. This made a pretext for her to express delighted thanks, and for a little she played her part so well that all Henry's doubts were set at rest, and he told himself that he had been imaginative and foolish to think that anything was changed in her.

He helped her to put all the lovely blooms into vases,

Digitized by Google

so happy to think they should give her pleasure. And all the while he talked to her lovingly and soothingly, until Sabine could have screamed aloud, so full of remorse and constraint she felt. If he would only be disagreeable or unkind!

At last, among the giant violets, they came upon one bunch of white ones. These she took and separated, and, making them into two, she stuck one into her belt and gave Henry the other to put into his coat.

"Won't you fasten them in for me, dearest?" he said, his whole countenance full of passionate love.

She came nearer, and with hasty fingers put the flowers into his buttonhole.

The temptation was too great for Henry. He put his arm round her and drew her to his side, while he bent and kissed her sweet red mouth.

She did not resist him or start away, but she grew white as death, and he was conscious that, as he clasped her close, a repressed shudder ran through her whole frame.

With a little cry of anguish he put her from him, and searched with miserable eyes for some message in her face. But her lids were lowered and her lips were quivering with some pain.

"My darling, what is it? Sabine, you shrank from me! What does it mean?"

"It means—nothing, Henry." And the poor child tried to smile. "Only that I am very foolish and silly,

Digitized by Google

and I do not believe I like caresses—much." And then, to make things sound more light, she went on: "You see, I have had so few of them in my life. You must be patient with me until I learn to—understand."

Of course he would be patient, he assured her, and asked her to forgive him if he had been brusque, his refined voice full of adoring contrition. He caught at any gossamer thread to stifle the obvious thought that if she loved him even ever so little he would not have to accustom her to caresses; she would long ago have been willing to learn all of their meanings in his arms!—and this was only the second time during their acquaintance that she had even let him kiss her!

But of her own free will she now came and leaned her head against his shoulder.

"Henry," she pleaded, "I am not really as I know you think I am—a gentle and loving woman. There are all sorts of fierce sides in my character which you have not an idea of, and I am only beginning to guess at them myself. I do not know that I shall ever be able to make you happy. I am sure I shall not unless you will be contented with very little."

"The smallest tip of your finger is more precious to me than all the world, darling!" he protested with heat. "I will be patient. I will be anything you wish. I will not even touch you again until you give me leave. Oh! I adore you so—Sabine, I will bear anything if only you do not mean that you want to send me away."

Digitized by Google

The anguish and fond worship in his face wrung her heart. She started from him and then, returning, held out her arms, while she cried with a pitiful gasp, almost as of a sob in her throat:

"Yes—take me and kiss me—kiss me until I don't feel!—I mean until I feel—Henry, you said you would make me forget!"

He encircled her with his arm and led her to a sofa, murmuring every vow of passionate love; and here he sat by her and kissed her and caressed her to his heart's content, while she remained apparently passive, but still as white as the violets in her dress, and inwardly she could hardly keep from screaming, the torture of it was so great. At last she could bear no more, but disengaging herself from his arms she slipped on to the floor, and there sat upon a low footstool, with her back to the fire, shivering as though with icy cold.

Lord Fordyce's instincts were too fine not to realize something of the meaning of this scene. Although not greatly learned in the ways of women, he had kissed them often before in his life, and none had received his caresses like that. But since she did not repulse him, he must not despair. She perhaps was, as she said, unused to fond dalliance, and he must be more controlled, and wait. So with an inward sense of pain and chill in his heart, he set himself to divert her otherwise, talking of the books which they both loved, and so at last, when

Digitized by Google

Nicholas announced that déjeuner was ready, some color and animation had come back to her face.

But when she was alone in her room she looked out of the high window and passionately threw up her arms.

"I cannot bear it again!" she wailed fiercely. "I feel an utterly degraded wretch."

At breakfast the Père Anselme watched her intently while he kept his aloof air. He felt that something extra had disturbed her. He was to stay in the house with them on Christmas night, because it was so cold for him to return to his home after dinner, and Sabine could not possibly spare him; she assured him he must be with them at every meal. His wit was so apt, and with Madame Imogen's aid he kept the ball rolling as merrily as he could. But he, no less than Henry, was conscious that all was not well.

And afterwards, as he went towards the village, he communed with himself, his kind heart torn with the deep-seated look of resignation in the eyes of his Dame d'Héronac.

"She is too young to be made to suffer it," he said, half aloud. "The good God cannot ask so much, as a price for wilfulness; and if this man has grown as distasteful to her as her face seems to suggest, nothing but misery could come from their dual life." It was all very cruel to the Englishman, no doubt, but where was the wisdom of letting two people suffer? Surely it was better to let only one pay the stakes, and if this

Digitized by Google

thing went on, both would have equal unhappiness, and be tied together as two animals in a managerie cage.

No gentleman should accept such a sacrifice. If the Lord Fordyce did not realize for himself that something had changed things, it must be that he, Gaston d'Héronac, the Père Anselme, must intervene. It might be very fine and noble to stick to one's word, but it became quixotic if to do so could only bring misery to oneself and one's mate!

The good priest stalked on to his *presbytère*, and then to his church, to see that all should be ready for *réveillon* that night, and he was returning to the château to tea when he met Henry taking a walk.

After lunch Sabine had gone off with Moravia to Girolamo's nurseries, and Lord Fordyce had felt he must go out and get some air. Mr. Cloudwater had started with Madame Imogen in the motor on a commission to their little town directly they had all left the dining-room. Thus Henry was alone.

He greeted the Père Anselme gladly. The old priest's cultivated mind was to him always a source of delight.

So he turned back and walked with him into the garden and along by the sea wall, instead of across the causeway and to the house. This was the doing of the Père Anselme, for he felt now might be his time.

Henry had been growing more and more troubled while he had been out by himself. He could not disguise the fact that there was some great change in Sa-

Digitized by Google

bine, and now his anxious mood craved sympathy and counsel from this her great friend.

"Madame Howard does not look quite well, Father," he remarked, after they had pulled some modern philosophies to pieces, and there had been a pause. "She is so nervous—what is the cause of it, do you know? Perhaps this place does not suit her in the winter. It is so very cold."

"Yes, it is cold—but that is not the reason." And the Père Anselme drew closer his old black cloak. "There are other and stronger causes for the state in which we find the Dame Sabine."

Henry peered into his face anxiously in the gray light—it was four o'clock, the day would soon be gone. He knew that these words contained ominous meaning, and his voice was rather unsteady as he asked:

"What are the reasons, Father? Please tell me if you are at liberty to do so. To me the welfare of this dear lady is all that matters in life."

The Curé of Héronac cleared his throat, and then he said gently:

"I spoke once before to you about the cinders and as to whether or no they were still red. That is what causes her to be restless—she has found that they are yet alight."

Lord Fordyce was a brave man, but he grew very pale. It seemed that suddenly all the fears which his heart had sheltered, though would not own as facts,

Digitized by Google

were rising before him like giant skeletons, concrete and distinct.

"But the divorce is going well!" he exclaimed a little passionately, his hurt was so great. "She told me so last night; she will be free some time in January, and will then be my wife."

His happiness should not be torn from him without a desperate fight.

The priest's voice was very sad as he answered:

"That is so. She will, no doubt, be ready to marry you whenever you ask it is for you to demand of yourself whether you will accept her sacrifice."

"Sacrifice! I would never dream of any sacrifice. It is unthinkable, Father!"

Anguish now distraught Henry's soul; he stopped in his walk and looked full at the priest, his fine, distinguished face working with suffering. The Père Anselme thought to himself that he would have done very well for the model of a martyr of old. It distressed him deeply to see his pain and to know that there would be more to come.

"Her happiness is all that I care for—surely you know this—but what has caused this change? Has she seen her husband again?—I——" Here Henry stopped, a sense of stupefaction set in. What could it all mean?

"We have never spoken upon the matter," the priest answered him. "I cannot say, but I think—yes, she has

Digitized by Google

certainly come under his influence again. Have you never searched in your mind, Monsieur, to ask yourself who this husband could be?"

"No—! How should I have done so? I have never been in America in my life." And then Henry's haggard eyes caught a look in the old priest's face. "My God!" he cried, agony in his voice, "you would suggest that it is some one I may know!"

"I suggest nothing, Monsieur. I make my own deductions from events. Will you not do the same?"

Henry covered his eyes with his hands. It seemed as though reason were slipping from him; and then, like a flash of lightning which cleared his brain, the reality struck him.

"It is Michael Arranstoun," he said with a moan.

"We know nothing for certain," proclaimed the Père Anselme. "But the alteration began from this young man's visit. That is why I warned you to well ascertain the truth of her feelings before going further. I would have saved you pain."

Henry staggered to the wall of the summer-house and leant there. His face was ashen-gray in the afternoon's dying light.

"Oh, how hopelessly blind I have been!"

The priest unclasped his tightly-locked hands; his old eyes were full of pity as he answered:

"We may both have made mistakes. You are more aware of the circumstances than I am. The Seigneur

Digitized by Google

of Arranstoun is the only man she has seen here besides yourself. You perhaps know whom she met in England, or Paris?"

"It is Michael Arranstoun," Henry said in a voice strangled and altered with suffering. "I see every link in the chain—but, O God! why have they deceived me? What can it mean? What hideous, fiendish cruelty! And Michael was my old friend."

A wild rage and resentment convulsed him. He only felt that he wished to kill both these traitors, who had tricked him and destroyed his beliefs and his happiness. Ghastly thoughts that there might be further disclosures of more shameful deceptions to come shook him. He was trembling with passion—and then the priest said something in his grave, quiet voice which almost stunned him.

"Has it been done in cruelty, my son? You must examine well the facts before you assert that. You must not forget that whoever the husband may be, he has consented to divorce her, and she is now going to give herself to you. Is that cruelty, my son? Or is it a fine keeping to a given word? It looks to me more like a noble sacrifice, unless the Seigneur of Arranstoun was aware before he ever came here that Madame Howard was his wife."

Lord Fordyce controlled himself. This thing must be thought out.

"No, Michael could not have known it," after a mo-

Digitized by Google

ment or two he averred. "He even laughed over the name when I told it to him, and said he had a scapegrace cousin out in Arizona and wondered if the husband could be the same——"

Then further recollections came with a frightful stab of anguish, crushing all passion and anger and leaving only a sensation of pain, for he remembered that his friend had given him his word of honor that he would not interfere with him in his love-making—and, indeed, would help him in every way he could, even to lending him Arranstoun for the honeymoon! That letter of his, too, when he had gone from Héronac, saying in it casually he hoped that he, Henry, thought that he had played the game!—Yes, it was all perfectly plain. Michael had come there in all innocence, and could not be blamed. He remembered numbers of things unnoticed at the time—his own talk with Sabine when he had discussed Michael's marriage—and this brought him up suddenly to her side of the question. Why, in heaven's name, had she not told him the truth at once? Why had she pretended not to recognize Michael? For, however Michael might have started, since he, Henry, was not looking at him, Sabine, whose face he had been gazing into all the while, had shown no faintest recognition of him. What a superb actress she must be!—or perhaps, having only seen him those two times in her life, for those short moments, she really did not recognize him then. The whole thing was so staggering in

Digitized by Google

its hideous tragedy his brain almost refused to think; but he said this last thought aloud, and the priest's strange sudden silence struck even his numbed sense.

"She had only seen him for such a little while—they parted immediately after the wedding; it was merely an empty ceremony, you know. Why, then, should she have had any haunting memories of him?"

The Père Anselme avoided answering this question by asking another.

"You knew that the Seigneur of Arranstoun was wedded, it would seem. How was that?"

Then Henry told him the outline of Michael's story, and the cruel irony of fate in having made him himself leave the house before seeing Sabine struck them both.

"What can her reasons have been for not telling me all this time, Father?" the unhappy man asked at last, in a hopeless voice. "Can you in any way guess?"

The Père Anselme mused for a moment.

"I have my own thoughts upon the matter, my son. We who live lonely lives very close to Nature get into the way of studying things. I have, as I told you, made some deductions, but, if you will permit me to give you some counsel, I would tell you to go back to the château now, with no *parti pris*, and seek her immediately, and get her to tell you the whole truth yourself. Of what good for you and me to speculate, since we neither of us know all the facts?—or even, if our suppositions are correct——" Then, as Lord Fordyce hesitated, he con-

Digitized by Google

tinued: "The time has passed for reticence. There should be no more avoiding of feared subjects. Go, go, my son, and discover the entire truth."

"And what then!" The cry came from Henry's agonized heart. But the priest answered gravely:

"That is in the hand of God. My duty is done."

And so they returned in silence, the Père Anselme praying fervently to himself. And when they reached the house, Lord Fordyce stumbled up the stone stairs heavily and knocked at the door of Sabine's sitting-room. He had seen Moravia at her window in the inner building, and knew that this woman who held his life in her hand would be alone.

Then, in response to a gentle "*Entrez*" he opened the door and went in.

* * * * * * *

Sabine had been sitting at her writing-table, an open blue despatch-box at her side. She was at the far end of the great apartment, so that Henry had some way to go toward her in the gloom, as, but for the large lamp near her and the blazing wood fire at each end, there was no light in the vast room. She rose to meet him, a gentle smile upon her face, and then, when he came close to her, she realized that something had happened, and suddenly put her hand out to steady herself upon the back of a chair.

"Henry—what is it?" she said, in a very low voice.

Digitized by Google

"Come, let us go over there and sit down," and she drew him to the same sofa where that very morning they had sat when she had let him kiss her. This thought was extra pain.

He was so very quiet he frightened her, and his gray eyes looked into hers with such a world of despair, but no reproach.

"Sabine," he commanded in a voice out of which had vanished all life and hope, "tell me the whole story, my dear love."

She clasped her hands convulsively—so the dreaded moment had come! There would be no use in making any excuses or protestations, her duty now was to master herself and collect her words to tell him the truth. The utter misery in his noble face wrung her heart, so that her voice trembled too much to speak at first; then she controlled it and began.

* * * * * * *

So all was told at last.

Then Henry took her two cold hands again and drew her up with him as he rose.

"Sabine," he said with deep emotion, his heart at breaking point, but all thought of himself put aside in the supreme unselfishness of his worship; "Sabine, to-morrow I will prove to you what true love means. But now, my dearest, I will say good-night. I think I must

Digitized by Google

go to my room for a little; this has been a tremendous shock."

He bent and kissed her forehead with reverence and blessing, as her father might have done, and, hiding all further emotion, he walked steadily from the room.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Lord Fordyce found himself alone, it felt as if life itself must leave him, the agony of pain was so great, the fiendish irony of circumstances. It almost seemed that each time he had intended to do a good thing, he had been punished. He had left Arranstoun for the best motive, and so had not seen Sabine and thus saved himself from future pain; he had taken Michael to Héronac out of kindly friendship, and this had robbed him of his happiness. But, awful as the discovery was now, it was not half so terrible as it would have been if the truth had only come to him later, when Sabine had become his wife. He must be thankful for that. Things had always been inevitable; it was plain to be understood that she had loved Michael all along, and nothing he personally could have done with all his devotion could have changed this fact. He ought to have known that it was hopeless and that he was only living in a fool's paradise. Never once had he seen the light in her eyes for himself which sprang there even at the mention of Michael's name. What was this tremendous power this man pos-

Digitized by Google

sessed to so deeply affect women, to so greatly charm every one? Was it just "it," as the Princess had said? Anguish now fell upon Henry; there was no consolation anywhere to be found.

He went over again all the details of the story he had heard, and himself filled up the links in the chain. How brutal it was of Michael to have induced her to stay—even if she remained of her own accord—and then the frightful thoughtless recklessness of letting her go off afterwards just because he was angry! Wild fury blazed up against his old friend. The poor darling little girl to be left to suffer all alone! Oh! how tender and passionately devoted he would have been under the same circumstances. Would Michael ever make her happy or take proper care of her? He paced his room, his mind racked with pain. Every single turn of events came back to him, and his own incredible blindness. How had he been so unseeing? How, to begin with, had he not recalled the name of Sabine as being the one he had read long ago in the paper as that of the girl whom Michael had gone through the ceremony of marriage with? It had faded completely from his memory. Everything seemed to have combined to lead him on to predestined disaster and misery—even in Sabine's and Michael's combining to keep the matter secret from him not to cause him pain—all had augmented the suffering now. If—but there was no good in contemplating ifs—what he had to do was to think clearly as to what

Digitized by Google

would be the wisest course to secure his darling's happiness. That must be his first consideration. After that, he must face his own cruel fate with what courage he could command.

Her happiness could only come through the divorce proceedings being stopped at once, and in her being free to go back to the man whom she loved. Then the aspect that Michael had been willing to do a really fine thing for the sake of friendship struck him—perhaps he was worthy of Sabine, after all; and they were young and absolutely suited to one another. No, the wickedness would have been if he, whose youth had passed, had claimed her and come between. He was only now going through the same agony his friend must have done, and he had a stronger motive to help him, in the wish to secure the joy of this adored woman, whereas Michael knew he was condemning her to sorrow as well as himself, and had been strong enough to do it simply from honor and friendship. No, he had no right to think of him as brutal or not fine; and now it was for him, Henry, to bring back happiness to his darling and to his old friend.

He sat down in a chair beside the fire and set himself to think. To have to take some decided course came as a relief. He would go out into the village and telegraph to Michael to come to Héronac at once. He was in Paris, staying at the Ritz, he knew; he could be there to-morrow—on Christmas Day! Surely that was well,

Digitized by Google

when peace and good-will towards men should be over all the earth—and he, Henry, would meet him at the house of the Père Anselme and explain all to him, and then take him back to Sabine. He would not see her again until then.

He found telegraph forms on his writing-table and rapidly wrote out his message. "Come immediately by first train, meet me at house of Père Anselme, a matter of gravest importance to you and Sabine," and he signed it "Fordyce." Then he firmly controlled himself and went off with it into the night.

The cold air struck his face and confronted him with its fierceness; the wind was getting up; to-morrow the waves would again be rough.

The village was not far away, and he soon had reached his goal and sent the telegram. Then he stopped at the *presbytère*. He must speak once more to the priest. The Père Anselme led him in to his bare little parlor and drew him to the warm china stove. It was only two hours since they had parted, but Lord Fordyce looked like an old man.

"I have come to tell you, my Father," he said, "that I know all of the story now, and it is terrible enough; but I want you to help me to secure her happiness. Michael Arranstoun is her husband, as you supposed, and she loves him." The old priest nodded his head comprehendingly, and Henry went on. "They only parted to save me pain. It was a tremendous sacrifice

Digitized by Google

which, of course, I cannot accept. So now I have sent for him, and I want you to let me meet him here at your house, and explain everything to him to-morrow before he sees her. I hope, if he gets my telegram in time, he will catch the train from Paris at midnight to-night; it gets in about nine in the morning. Then they can be happy on Christmas Day."

"You have done nobly, my son," and the Père Anselme lifted his hand in blessing. "It is very merciful that this has been in time. You will not be permitted to suffer beyond your strength since you have done well. The good God is beyond all things, just. My home is at your service— And how is she, our dear Dame d'Héronac? Does she know that her husband will come?"

"She knows nothing. I told her we should settle all questions to-morrow. She offered to keep her word to me, the dear child."

"And she told you the whole story? She had the courage? Yes? That was fine of her, because she has never spoken of all her sorrows directly, even to me."

"She told me everything, Father. There are no secrets any more; and her story is a pitiful one, because she was so young."

"It is possible it has been well for them," the priest said meditatively, looking into the glowing fire in the stove whose door he had opened. "They were too young and undisciplined at first for happiness—they have come through so much suffering now they will cling to each

Digitized by Google

other and joy and not let it slip from their hands. She is more suited to such a one as the Seigneur of Arranstoun than any other—there is a vigor of youth in her which must find expression. And it is something to be of noble blood, after all." Here he turned and looked contemplatively at Henry. "It makes one able to surmount anguish and remain a gentleman with manners, even at such a cruel crisis as this. You have all my deep understanding and sympathy, my son. I, too, have passed that way, and know your pain. But consolation will come. I find it here in the cure of souls—you will find it in your England, leading your fellow countrymen to finer ends. It is not for all of us, the glory of the dawn or the meridian, but we can all secure a sunset of blessed peace if we will." And then, as Henry wrung his thin old hand, he muttered with tenderness, "Good-night, and *pax vobiscum*," while a moisture glistened in his keen black eyes.

And when the door was closed upon his guest he turned back into his little room, this thought going on with him:

"A great gentleman—though my Dame d'Héronac will be happier with the fierce one. Youth must have its day, and all is well."

But Henry, striding in the dark with the sound of the rushing sea for company, found no consolation.

When he got back to the château and was going up the chief staircase to his room, he met Moravia coming

Digitized by Google

down. She had just left Sabine and knew the outlines of what had happened. Her astonishment and distress had been great, but underneath, as she was only human, there was some sense of personal upliftment; she could try to comfort the disconsolate lover at least. Sabine had given her to understand that nothing was finally settled between herself and Henry, but Moravia felt there could be only one end; she knew he was too unselfish to hold Sabine for an instant, once he understood that she would rather be free; so it was in the character of fond friend that she put out her hand and grasped his in silent sympathy.

"Henry," she whispered with tears in her usually merry eyes, "my heart is breaking for you. Can I do anything?"

He would rather that she had not spoken of his sorrow at all, being a singularly reticent person, but he was touched by the love and solicitude in her face, and took and held her white fingers.

"You are always so good to me. But there is nothing to be done."

She slid her other hand into his arm and drew him on into the little sitting-room which was always set apart for her, close to her room.

"I am going to take care of you for the next hour, anyway—you look frozen," she told him. "I shall make you sit in the big chair by the fire while I give you something to drink. It is only half-past six."

Digitized by Google

Then with fond severity she pushed him into a comfortable *bergère*, and, leaving him, gave an order to her maid in the next room to bring some brandy. But before it came Moravia went back again, and drawing a low stool sat down almost at Henry's feet.

The fire and her gentleness were soothing to him, as he lay there huddled in the chair. The physical reaction was upon him from the shock and he felt almost as though he were going to faint.

Moravia watched him anxiously for some time without speaking—he was so very pale. Then she got up quickly when the maid brought in the tray, and pouring him out some brandy she brought it over and knelt down by his side.

"Drink this," she commanded kindly. "I shall not stir until you do."

Henry took the glass with nerveless fingers and gulped down the liquid as he was bid, but although she took the glass from him she did not get off her knees; indeed, when she had pushed it on to the tray near her, she came closer still and laid her cheek against his coat, taking his right hand and chafing it between her own to bring back some life into him, while she kept up a murmured flow of sweet sympathy—as one would talk to an unhappy child.

Henry was not actually listening to her, but the warmth and the great vibrations of love coming from

Digitized by Google

her began to affect him unconsciously, so that he slipped his arm round her and drew her to his side.

"Henry," she whispered with a little gasp in her breath, "I would take all pain away from you, dear, if I could, but I can't do anything, only just pet and love you into feeling better. After all, everything passes in time. I thought I should never get over the death of my husband, Girolamo, and now I don't care a bit—in fact, I only care about you and want to make you less unhappy."

The Princess thoroughly believed in La Rochefoucauld's maxim with the advice that people were more likely to take to a new passion when still agitated by the rests of the old one than if they were completely cured. She intended, now that she was released from all honor to her friend, to do her very uttermost to draw Henry to herself, and thought it much wiser to begin to strike when the iron was hot.

Henry did not answer her; he merely pressed her hand, while he thought how un-English her action was, and how very kind. She was certainly the dearest woman he had ever met—beyond Sabine.

Moravia was not at all discouraged, but continued to rub his hands, first one and then the other, while he remained passive under her touch.

"Sabine is perfectly crushed with all this," she went on. "I have just left her. She does not know what you mean to do, but I am sure I can guess. You mean

Digitized by Google

to give her back to Mr. Arranstoun—and it will be much better. She has always been in love with him, I believe, and would never have agreed to try to arrange for a divorce if she had not been awfully jealous about Daisy Van der Horn. I remember now telling her quite innocently of the reports about them in Paris before we went to England, and now that I come to think of it, I noticed she was rather spiteful over it at the time."

Henry did not answer, so she continued, in a frank, matter-of-fact way:

"You can imagine what a strange character Sabine has when I tell you, in all these years of our intimate friendship she never has told me a word of her story until just now. She was keeping it all in to herself—I can't think why."

Henry did speak at last, but his words came slowly. "She wanted to forget, poor little girl, and that was the best way to bury it all out of sight."

"There you are quite wrong," returned Moravia, now seated upon her footstool again, very close, with her elbows propped on Henry's knees, while she still held his hands and intermittently caressed them with her cheek. "That is the way to keep hurts burning and paining forever, fostering them all in the dark—it is much better to speak about them and let the sun get in on them and take all their sorrow away. That is why I would not let you be by yourself now, dear friend, as I suppose one of your reserved countrymen would have

Digitized by Google

done. I just determined to make you talk about it, and to realize that there are lots of lovely other things to comfort you, and that you are not all alone."

Henry was strangely touched at her kind common sense; he already felt better and not so utterly crushed out with despair. He told her how sweet and good she was and what a true, unselfish woman—but Moravia shook her head.

"I am not a bit; it is purely interested, because I am so awfully fond of you myself. I *love* to pet you—there!" and she laughed softly, so happy to see that she had been able even to make this slight effect, for she saw the color had come back in a measure to his face, and her keen brain told her that this was the right tack to go upon—not to be too serious or show any sentiment, but just to use a sharp knife and cut round all the wound and then pour honey and balm into it herself.

"You and Sabine would never really have been happy together," she now told him. "You were much too subservient to her and let her order you about. She would have grown into a bully. Now, Mr. Arranstoun won't stand a scrap of nonsense, I am sure; he would make any woman obey him—if necessary by using brute force! They are perfectly suited to one another, and very soon you will realize it and won't care. Do you remember how we talked at dinner that night at Ebbsworth about women having to go through a stage in

Digitized by Google

their lives sooner or later when they adored just strength in a man and wanted a master? Well, I wondered then if Sabine had passed hers, but I was afraid of hurting you, so I would not say that I rather thought she had not."

"Oh, I wish you had!" Henry spoke at last. "And yet, no—the whole thing has been inevitable from the first, I see it plainly. The only thing is, if I had found it out sooner it might have saved Sabine pain. But it is not too late, thank God—the divorce proceedings can be quashed; it would have been a little ironical if she had had to marry him again."

"Yes," Moravia agreed. "Now, if we could only get him to come here immediately, we could explain it all to him and make him wire to his lawyers at once."

"I have already sent for him—I think he will arrive to-morrow at nine."

"How glorious! It was just the dear, splendid thing you would do, Henry," Moravia cried, getting up from her knees. "But we won't tell Sabine; we will just let her mope there up in her room, feeling as miserable as she deserves to be for not knowing her own mind. We will all have a nice dinner—no, that won't be it—you and I will dine alone here, up in this room, and Papa can talk to Madame Imogen. In this house, thank goodness, we can all do what we like, and I am not going to leave you, Henry, until we have got to say good-night. I don't care whether you want me or not—

Digitized by Google

I have just taken charge of you, and I mean you to do what I wish—there!"

And she crept closer to him again and laid her face upon his breast, so that his cheek was resting upon her soft dark hair. Great waves of comfort flowed to Henry. This sweet woman loved him, at all events. So he put his arm round her again, while he assured her he did want her, and that she was an angel, and other such terms. And by the time she allowed him to go to his room to dress for dinner, a great measure of his usual nerve and balance was restored. She had not given him a moment to think, even shaking her finger at him and saying that if he was more than twenty minutes dressing, she would herself come and fetch him and bring him back to her room.

Then, when he had left her, this true daughter of Eve, after ordering dinner to be served to them, proceeded to make herself as beautiful as possible for the next scene. She felt radiant. It was enormous what she had done.

"Why, he was on the verge of suicide!" she said to herself, "and now he is almost ready to smile. Before the evening is over I shall have made him kiss me—and before a month is past we shall be engaged. What perfect nonsense to have silly mawkish sentiment over anything! The thing to do is to win one's game."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII

LORD FORDYCE found himself dressing in the usual way and with the usual care, such creatures of habit are we—and yet, two hours earlier, he had felt that life was over for him. Although he did not know it, Moravia had been like a strong restorative applied at the right moment, and the crisis of his agony had gone by. It was not that he was not still overcome by sorrow, or that moments of complete anguish would not recur, but the current had been diverted from taking a fatal turn, and gradually things would mend. The perfect, practical common sense of Moravia was so good for him. She was not intellectual like Sabine, she was just a dear, beautiful, kind, ordinary woman, extremely in love with him, but too truly American ever to lose her head, and now in real spirits at the prospect of playing so delightful a game. She was thoroughly versed in the ways of male creatures, and although she possessed none of Sabine's indescribable charm, she had had numbers of admirers and would-be lovers and was in every way fitted to cope with any man. This evening, she had determined so to soothe, flatter and pet Henry that he should go to bed

Digitized by Google

not realizing that there was any change in himself, but should be in reality completely changed. Her preparations had been swift but elaborate. She had rushed to Madame Imogen's room, and got her to take special messages to the chef, and dinner would be waited on by her own maid—with Nicholas just to run in and open the champagne. Then she selected a ravishing rose-pink chiffon tea-gown, all lacy and fresh, and lastly she had a big fire made up and all the curtains drawn, and so she awaited Henry's coming with anticipations of delight. She had even got Mr. Cloudwater (that *père aprivoisé!*) to mix her two dry Martini cocktails, which were ready for her guest.

Henry knocked at the door exactly at eight o'clock, and she went to meet him with all the air of authority of a mother, and led him into the room, pushing him gently into the chair she had prepared for him. A man may have a broken heart—but the hurt cannot feel so great when he is surrounded with every comfort and ministered to by a beautiful young woman, who is not only in love with him, but has the nerve to keep her head and not neglect a single point which can be of use in her game.

If she had shown him too much sympathy, or just been ultra-refined and silent and adoring, Henry by this time would have been quite as unhappy as he had been at first; but he was too courteous by nature not to try to be polite and appreciative of kindness when

Digitized by Google

she tendered it so frankly, no matter what his inward feelings might be—and this she knew she could count upon and meant to exploit. She argued very truly that if he were obliged to act, it would brace him up and be beneficial to him, even though at the moment he would much prefer to be alone. So now she made him drink the cocktail, and then she deliberately spoke of Sabine, wondering if she would be awfully surprised to see Michael, and if he would take her back with him to Arranstoun. Henry winced at every word, but he had to answer, and presently he found he did not feel so sad. Then, with dexterity, she turned the conversation to English politics and got him to explain points to her, and at every moment she poured in insidious flattery and frank, kind affection, so that by the time the ice had come, Henry had begun to feel unaccountably soothed. She was really a beautiful woman and arranged with a wonderful *chic*, and he realized that she had never looked more charming or been so sweet. She had all the sense of power being on her side, now that she had a free hand, unhampered by honor to her friend, and when the dessert and the cigarettes had come, she felt that she might indulge in a little sentiment.

She remembered that he only smoked cigars, and got up and helped him to light one of his own; and when she was quite close to him, she put her hand out and stroked his hair.

"Even if he does not like it at first," she told herself,

Digitized by Google

"he is too polite to say so, and presently, just because he is a man, it will give him a thrill."

"I do love your light hair, Henry," she said aloud, "and it is so well brushed. You Englishmen are certainly *soigné* creatures, and I like your lazy, easy grace—as though you would never put yourself out for any one. I can't bear a fuss." She puffed her cigarette and did not wait for him to answer her, but prattled on perfectly at ease. Even his courtesy would not have prevented him from snubbing her, if she had been the least tentative in her caressings, or the least diffident. But she just took it as a matter of course that she could stroke his hair if she wanted to, and presently it began to give him a sensation of pleasure and rest. If she had, by word or look, suggested that she expected some return, Henry would have frozen at once—but all she did was apparently only to please herself, and so he had no defense to make. Still in the character of domestic tyrant, she presently led him to the comfortable arm-chair, and once more seated herself upon the stool close to the fire by his side. Here she was silent for a few moments, letting the comfort of the whole scene sink in to his brain—and then, when the maid came in to clear away the dinner-table, she got up and went to the piano, where she played some soft, but not sentimental tunes. Music of a certain sort would be the worst thing for him, but a light air while Marie was in the room could do no harm. Though, when she went

Digitized by Google

over close to him again, she saw that even this pause had allowed him time to think, and that his face was once more overcome by melancholy, although he greeted her with a smile.

Something further must be done.

"Henry," she said, cooingly, kneeling down beside him and taking his hand, "will you promise me something, please. I am not clever like you, but I do know one splendid recipe for taking away pain; every time the thought of Sabine comes up to you and the old pictures you used to hold, look them squarely in the face, and then deliberately replace them with others that you can obtain—the strange law of periodicity will be in motion and, if you have only will enough, gradually the pictures that can be yours will unconsciously have taken the place of the old ones which have caused you pain. Is it not much better to do that than just to let yourself grieve—surely it is more like a man?"

Henry looked at her, a little startled. This idea had never presented itself to him. Yes, it was certainly more like a man to try any measure than "just to grieve," and what if there should be some truth in this suggestion—? What did the "law of periodicity" mean? What an American phrase! How apt they were at coining expressive sentences. He looked into the glowing ashes—there he seemed to see in ruins the whole fabric of his dreams—but if there was a law which brought thoughts back, and back again at the same hour each

Digitized by Google

day, then Moravia was right: he must blot out the old pictures and conjure up new ones—but what could they be——?

"You are musing, Henry," Moravia's voice went on. "Are you thinking over what I said? I hope so, and you will find it is true. See, I will tell you what to visualize there in the fire. You are looking at a splendid English home, all peace and warmth, and you see yourself in it happy and surrounded by friends. And you see yourself a great man, the center of political interest, and everything coming toward you that heart can desire. It is awfully wanting in common sense to think because you cannot obtain one woman there are none others in the world."

"Awfully," agreed Henry—suddenly taking in the attractive picture she made, seated there at his knees, her white hand holding his hand. His thoughts wandered for a moment, as thought will do when the mind is overstrained; they wandered to the speculation of why American women should have such small and white hands, and then he brought himself back to the actual conversation.

"You mean to tell me," he said, "that if every time I remember, when I am dwelling upon the subject which pains me, that I must make my thoughts turn to other things which give me pleasure, that gradually the new thoughts will banish the old?"

"Of course, I mean that," Moravia told him. "Every-

Digitized by Google

thing comes in cycles; that is why people get into habits. You just try, Henry; you can cure the habit of pain as easily as you can cure any habit. It is all a question of will."

She saw that she had created interest in his eyes, and rejoiced. That crisis had passed! and it would be safe to go on.

"I shall not get him to kiss me to-night, after all," she decided to herself. "If I did, he would probably feel annoyed to-morrow, with some ridiculous sense of a too sudden disloyalty to Sabine's memory—and he might be huffed with himself, too, thinking he had given way; it might wound his vanity. I shall just draw him right out and make him want to kiss me, but not consciously—and then it will be safe when he is at that pitch to let him go off to bed."

This plan she proceeded to put into practice. She exploited the subject they had been talking of to its length, and aroused a sharp discussion and argument—while she took care to place herself in the most alluring attitudes as close to Henry as she possibly could be, while maintaining a basis of frank friendship, and then she changed the current by getting him to explain to her exactly what he had done about Michael, and how they should arrange the meeting between the two, putting into her eagerness all the sparkle that she would have used in collaborating with him over the placing of the presents upon a Christmas tree—until,

Digitized by Google

at last, Henry began to take some sort of pride in the thing itself.

"I want you to let Sabine think you are just going to forgive her for her deception, but intend her to keep her word to you; and then you can take Mr. Arranstoun up to her sitting-room when you have brought him from the Père Anselme's—and just push him in and let them explain matters themselves. Won't it be a moment for them both!"

Henry writhed.

"Yes," he gasped, "a great moment."

"And you are not going to care one bit, Henry," Moravia went on, with authority. "I tell you, you are not."

Then, having made all clear as to their joint action upon the morrow, she spent the last half hour before they parted in instilling into his spirit every sort of comfort and subtle flattery until, when the clock struck eleven, Henry felt a sense of regret that he must say good-night.

By this time, her head was within a few inches of his shoulder, and her pretty eyes were gazing into his with the adoring affection of a child.

"You are an absolute darling, Moravia," he murmured, with some emotion, "the kindest woman in this world," and he bent and kissed her hair.

She showed no surprise—to take the caress naturally would, she felt, leave him with the pleasure of it, and

Digitized by Google

arouse no disturbing analyzations in his mind as to its meaning.

"Now you have got to go right off to your little bed," she said, in a matter of fact 'mother' tone, "and I should just like to come and tuck you up, and turn your light out—but as I can't, you'll promise me you will do it yourself at once—and close those eyes and go to sleep." Here she permitted herself softly to shut his lids with her smooth fingers.

Henry felt a delicious sense of comfort and peace creeping over him—he knew he did not wish to leave her —but he got up and took both her hands.

"Good-night, you sweet lady," he said. "You will never know how your kind heart has helped me to-night, nor can I express my gratitude for your spontaneous sympathy," with which he kissed the fair hands, and went regretfully toward the door.

Moravia thought this the right moment to show a little further sentiment.

"Good-night, Henry," she faltered. "It has been rather heaven for me—but I don't think I'll let you dine up here alone with me again—it—it might make my heart ache, too." And then she dexterously glided to the door of her bed-room and slipped in, shutting it softly.

And Henry found himself alone, with some new fire running in his veins.

When Moravia, listening, heard his footsteps going down the passage, she clasped her hands in glee.

Digitized by Google

"I 'shall never know'! 'My spontaneous sympathy'!— Oh! the darling, innocent babe! But I've won the game. He will belong to me now—and I shall make him happy. Ouida was most certainly right when she said, 'Men are not vicious; they are but children.'"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV

VERY early on Christmas morning, Lord Fordyce went down to the *presbytère* and walked with the Père Anselme on his way to Mass. He had come to a conclusion during the night. The worthy priest would be the more fitting person to see Michael than he, himself; he felt he could well leave all explanations in those able hands—and then, when his old friend knew everything, he, Henry, would meet him and bring him to the Château of Héronac, and so to Sabine.

The Père Anselme was quite willing to undertake this mission; he would have returned to his breakfast by then and would await Michael's arrival, he told Henry. Michael would come from the station, twenty kilometers away, in Henry's motor.

The wind had got up, and a gloriously rough sea beat itself against the rocks. The thundering surf seemed some comfort to Henry. He was unconscious of the fact that he felt very much better than he had ever imagined that he could feel after such a blow. Moravia's maneuvrings and sweet sympathy had been

Digitized by Google

most effective, and Henry had fallen asleep while her spell was still upon him—and only awakened after several hours of refreshing slumber. Then it was he decided upon the plan, which he put into execution as soon as daylight came. Now he left the old priest at the church door and strode away along the rough coast road, battling with the wind and trying to conquer his thoughts.

He was following Moravia's advice, and replacing each one of pain as it came with one of pleasure—and the cold air exhilarated his blood.

Michael, meanwhile, in the slow, unpleasant train, was a prey to anxiety and speculation. What had happened? There was no clue in Henry's dry words in the telegram. Had there been some disaster? Was Henry violently angry with him? What would their meeting bring? He had come in to the Ritz from a dinner party, and had got the telegram just in time to rush straight to the station with a hastily-packed bag, and get into an almost-moving train, and all night long he had wondered and wondered, as he sat in the corner of his carriage. But whatever had happened was a relief—it produced action. He had no longer just to try to kill time and stifle thought; he could do something for good or ill.

It seemed as though he would never arrive, as the hours wore on and dawn faded into daylight. Then, at last, the crawling engine drew up at his destination,

Digitized by Google

and he got out and recognized Henry's chauffeur waiting for him on the platform. The swift rush through the cold air refreshed him, and took away the fatigue of the long night—and soon they had drawn up at the door of the *presbytère*, and he found himself being shown by the priest's ancient housekeeper into the spotlessly clean parlor.

The Père Anselme joined him in a moment, and they silently shook hands.

"You are not aware, sir, why you have been sent for, I suppose?" the priest asked, with his mild courtesy. "Pray be seated, there by the stove, and I will endeavor to enlighten you."

Michael sat down.

"Please tell me everything," he said.

The Père Anselme spread out his thin hands toward the warmth of the china, while he remained standing opposite his visitor.

"The good God at last put it into the mind of the Lord Fordyce that our Dame d'Héronac has not been altogether happy of late—and upon my suggestion he questioned her as to the cause of this, and learned what I believe to be the truth—which you, sir, can corroborate—namely, that you are her husband and are obtaining the divorce not from desire, but from a motive of loyalty to your friend."

"That is the case," assented Michael quietly, a sudden great joy in his heart.

Digitized by Google

The priest was silent, so he went on:

"And what does Lord Fordyce mean to do?—release her and give her back to me—or what, *mon Père?*"

"Is it necessary to ask?" and Père Anselme lifted questioning and almost whimsical eyebrows. "Surely you must know that your friend is a gentleman!"

"Yes, I know that—but it must mean the most awful suffering to him—poor, dear old Henry—Is he quite knocked out?"

"The good God tries no one beyond his strength—he will find consolation. But, meanwhile, it will be well that you let me offer you the hospitality of my poor house for rest and refreshment"—here the old man made a courtly bow—"and when you have eaten and perhaps bathed, you can take the road to the Château of Héronac, where you will find Lord Fordyce by the garden wall, and he will perhaps take you to Madame Sabine. That is as he may think wisest—I believe she is quite unprepared. Of the reception you are likely to receive from her you are the best judge yourself."

"It seems too good to be true!" cried Michael, suddenly covering his face with his hands. "We have all been through an awful time, *mon Père.*"

"So it would seem. It is not the moment for me to tell you that you drew it all upon yourselves—since the good God has seen fit to restore you to happiness."

Digitized by Google

"I drew it upon us," protested Michael. "You know the whole story, Father?"

The old priest coughed slightly.

"I know most of it, my son. In it, you do not altogether shine——"

Michael got up from his chair, while he clasped his hands forcibly.

"No, indeed, I do not—I know I have been an unspeakable brute—I have not the grain of an excuse to offer—and yet she has forgiven me. Women are certainly angels, are they not, *mon Père*?"

The Curé of Héronac sighed gently.

"Angels when they love, and demons when they hate—of an unbalance—but a great charm. It lies with us men to decide the feather-weight which will make the scale go either way with them—to heaven or hell."

Here the ancient housekeeper announced that coffee and rolls were ready for them in the other room, and the Père Anselme led the way without further words.

Less than an hour later, the two men who loved this one woman met just over the causeway, where Henry awaited Michael's coming. It was a difficult moment for them both, but they clasped hands with a few ordinary words. Henry's walk in the wind had strengthened his nerves. For some reason, he was now conscious that he was feeling no acute pain as he had expected that he would do, and that there was even some kind of satisfaction in the thought that, on this

Digitized by Google

Christmas morning, he was able to bring great happiness to Sabine. He could not help remarking, as they crossed the drawbridge, that Michael looked a most suitable mate for her: he was such a picture of superb health and youth. As they entered the courtyard, Moravia and her little son came out of the main door.

The Princess greeted them gaily. She was going to show Girolamo the big waves from the causeway bridge before going on to church; they had a good half-hour. She experienced no surprise at seeing Michael, only asking about his night journey's uncomfortableness, and then she turned to Henry:

"Come and join us there by the high parapet, Henry, as soon as you have taken Mr. Arranstoun up to Sabine. She has not come out of her wing yet; but I know that she is dressed and in her sitting-room," and smiling merrily, she took Girolamo's little hand and went her way.

There was no sound when the two men reached Sabine's sitting-room door. Henry knocked gently, but no answer came; so he opened it and looked in. Great fires burned in the wide chimneys and his flowers gave forth sweet scent, but the Lady of Héronac was absent, or so it seemed.

"Come in, Michael, and wait," Henry said; and then, from the embrasure of the far window, they heard a stifled exclamation, and saw that Sabine was indeed there after all, and had risen from the floor, where she

Digitized by Google

had been kneeling by the window-seat looking out upon the waves.

Her face was deadly pale and showed signs of a night's vigil, but when she caught sight of Michael it was as though the sun had emerged from a cloud, so radiant grew her eyes. She stood quite still, waiting until they advanced near to her down the long room, and then she steadied herself against the back of a tall chair.

"Sabine," Henry said, "I want you to be very happy on this Christmas day, and so I have brought your husband back to you. All these foolish divorce proceedings are going to be stopped, and you and he can settle all your differences, together, dear—" then, as a glad cry forced itself from Sabine's lips—his voice broke with emotion. She stretched out her hands to him, and he took one and drew her to Michael, who stood behind him.

Then he took also his old friend's hand, and clasped it upon Sabine's.

"I am not much of a churchman," he said, hoarsely. "but this part of the marriage service is true, I expect. 'Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.'" Then he dropped their hands, and turned toward the door.

"Oh! Henry, you are so good to us!" Sabine cried. "No words can say what I feel."

But Lord Fordyce could bear no more—and mur-

Digitized by Google

muring some kind of blessing, he got from the room, leaving the two there in the embrasure of the great window gazing into each other's eyes.

As the door shut, Michael spoke at last:

"Sabine—My own!" he whispered, and held out his arms.

* * * * * * *

When Henry left Sabine's sitting-room, he staggered down the stairs like one blind—the poignant anguish had returned, and the mantle of comfort fell from his shoulders. He was human, after all, and the picture of the rapture on the faces of the two, showing him what he had never obtained, stabbed him like a knife. He felt that he would willingly drop over the causeway bridge into the boiling sea, and finish all the pain. He saw Moravia's blue velvet dress in the distance down the road when he left the lodge gates, and he fled into the garden; he must be alone—but she had seen him go, and knew that another crisis had come and that she must conquer this time also. So apparently only for the gratification of Girolamo, she turned and entered the garden—the garden which seemed to be a predestined spot for the stratagems of lovers!—then she strolled toward the sea-wall, not turning her head in the direction where she plainly perceived Henry had gone, but taking care that Girolamo should see him, as she knew he would run to him. This he immediately did, and dragged his victim back to his mother in the

Digitized by Google

pavilion which looked out over the sea. Girolamo was now three years old and a considerable imp; he displayed Henry proudly and boasted of his catch—while Moravia scolded him sweetly and asked Henry to forgive them for intruding upon his solitude.

"You know I understand you must want to be alone, dear friend, and I would not have come if I had seen you," she said, tenderly, while she turned and, leaning out, beckoned to the nurse, whom she could just see across the causeway on the courtyard wall, where the raised parapet was. Then allowing her feelings to overcome her judgment, she flung out her arms and seizing Henry's hands, she drew them into her warm, huge muff.

"Henry—I can't help it—!" she gasped. "It breaks my heart to see you so cold and white and numb—I want to warm and comfort and love you back to life again——!"

At this minute, the sun burst through the scudding clouds, and blazed in upon them from the archway; and it seemed to Henry as if a new vitality rushed into his frozen veins. She was so human and pretty, and young and real. Love for him spoke from her sparkling, brown eyes. The ascendancy she had obtained over him on the previous evening returned in a measure; he no longer wanted to get away from her and be alone.

He made some murmuring reply, and did not seek to draw away his hands—but a sudden change of feel-

Digitized by Google

ing seemed to come over Moravia for she lowered her head and a deep, pink flush grew in her cheeks.

"What will you think of me, Henry?" she whispered, pulling at his grasp, which grew firmer as she tried to loosen it. "I"—and then she raised her eyes, which were suffused with tears. "Oh! it seems such horrid waste for you to be sick with grief for Sabine, who is happy now—and that only I must grieve——"

Girolamo had seen his nurse entering the far gate and was racing off to meet her, so that they were quite alone in the pavilion now, and Moravia's words and the tears in her fond eyes had a tremendous effect upon Henry. It moved some unknown cloud in his emotions. She, too, wanted comfort, not he alone—and he could bring it to her and be soothed in return, so he drew her closer and closer to him, and framed her face in his hands.

"Moravia," he said, tenderly. "You shall not grieve, dear child— If you want me, take me, and I will give you all the devotion of true friendship—and, who knows, perhaps we shall find the Indian summer, after all, now that the gates of my fool's paradise are shut."

In the abstract, it was not highly gratifying to a woman's vanity, this declaration! but, as a matter of fact, it was beyond Moravia's wildest hopes. She had not a single doubt in her astute American mind that, once she should have the right to the society of Henry —with her knowledge of the ways of man—that she

Digitized by Google

would soon be able to obliterate all regrets for Sabine, and draw his affections completely to herself.

At this juncture, she showed a stroke of genius.

"Henry," she said, her voice vibrating with profound feeling, "I do want you—more than anything I have ever wanted in my life—and I will make you forget all your hurts—in my arms."

There was certainly nothing left for Lord Fordyce, being a gallant gentleman, to do but to stoop his tall head and kiss her—and, to his surprise, he found this duty turn into a pleasure—so that, in a few moments, when they were close together looking out upon the waves through the pavilion's wide windows, he encircled her with his arm—and then he burst into a laugh, but though it was cynical, it contained no bitterness.

"Moravia—you are a witch," he told her. "Here is a situation that, described, would read like pathos—and yet it has made us both happy. Half an hour ago, I was wishing I might step over into that foam—and now——"

"And now?" demanded the Princess, standing from him.

"And now I realize that, with the New Year, there may dawn new joys for me. Oh! my dear, if you will be content with what I can give you, let us be married soon and go to India for the rest of the winter."

* * * * * * *

The Père Anselme noticed that his only congregation

Digitized by Google

from the Château consisted of Mr. Cloudwater and Madame Imogen; and he thanked the good God—as he sent up a fervent prayer for the absentees' happiness.

"It means that they two are near heaven, and that consolation will come to the disconsolate one, since all four remain at home," he told himself. This was a dénouement worthy of Christmas Day, and of far more value in his eyes than the two pairs' mere presence in his church.

"The ways of the good God are marvellous," he mused, as he went to his vestry, "and it is fitting that youth should find its mate. We grieve and wring our hearts—and nothing is final—and while there is life there is hope—that love may bloom again. Peace be with them."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN the first moment of ecstasy in the knowledge that they were indeed given back to each other was over, Michael drew Sabine to the window seat where she had been crouching only that short while before in silent misery.

"Sweetheart," he entreated, "now you have got to tell me everything—do you understand, Sabine—every single thing from the first moment in the chapel when we made those vows until now when we are going to keep them. I want to know everything, darling child—all your thoughts and what you did with your life—and when you hated me and when you loved me——"

They sat down on the velvet cushions and Sabine nestled into his arms.

"It is so difficult, Michael," she cooed, "how can I begin? I was sillier and more ignorant than any other girl of seventeen could possibly be, I think—don't you? Oh! don't let us speak of that part—I only remember that when you kissed me first in the chapel some kind of strange emotion came to me—then I was frightened——"

Digitized by Google

"But not after a while," he interpolated, something of rapturous triumph in his fond glance, while he caressed and smoothed her hair, as her little head lay against his shoulder, "I thought you had forgiven me before I went to sleep."

"Perhaps I had—I did not know myself—only that there in the gray dawn everything seemed perfectly awful and horror and terror came upon me again, and I had only one wild impulse to rush away—surely you can understand—" she paused.

"Go on, sweetheart," he commanded, "I shall not let you off one detail. I love to make you tell me every single thing"—and he took her hand and played with her wedding ring, but not taking it off, while Sabine thrilled with happiness.

"Well—you did not wake—and so presently I got into the sitting-room, and at last found the certificate—and just as I was going out of the door on to the balcony I heard you call my name sleepily—and for one second I nearly went back—but I did not, and got safely away and to the hotel!"

"Think of my not waking!" Michael exclaimed. "If only I had—you would never have been allowed to go—it is maddening to remember what that sleep cost—but how did you manage at the hotel?"

"It was after five o'clock and the side door was open into the yard. Not a soul saw me, and I carried out my original plan. I think when I was in the train I

Digitized by Google

had already begun to regret bitterly, but it was too late to go back—and then next day your letter came to me at Mr. Parsons' and all my pride was up in arms!"

Here Michael held her very tight.

"Oh, what a brute I was to write that letter," he cried.

"All I wanted then was to go away and forget all about you and everything and have lots of nice clothes and join my friend Moravia in Paris. You see, I was still just a silly ignorant child. Mr. Parsons got me a good maid who is with me still, and he agreed at last to my taking the name of Howard—I thought if I kept the Arranstoun everyone would know."

"But what did you intend to do, darling, with your life. We were both crazy, of course, you to go—and I to let you."

"I had no concrete idea. Just to see the world and buy what I wanted, and sit up late—and not have to obey any rules, I think—and underneath there was a great excitement all the time in the thought of looking perfectly splendid in being a grand grown-up lady when you came back—for of course I believed then that we must meet again."

"Well, what changed all that and made you become engaged to Henry, you wicked little thing!" and Michael kissed her fondly— "Was it because I did not come back?—but you could have cabled to me at any time."

Digitized by Google

An enchanting confusion crept over Sabine—she hesitated—she began to speak, then stopped and finally buried her face in his coat.

"What is it, darling?" he asked with almost a tone of anxiety in his voice. "Did you have some violent flirtation with someone at this stage? and you think I shall be annoyed—but indeed I shall not, because I do fully realize that whatever you did was my fault for leaving you alone— Tell me, Sabine, you sweet child."

"No—it wasn't that——"

"Well—then?"

"Well—then I was—terrified—it was my old maid, Simone, who told me what had happened—I was still too ingorant to understand things."

"Told you what? What wretched story did the old woman invent about me?" Michael's eyes were haughty —that she could listen to stories from a maid!

Sabine clasped her hands together—she was deeply moved.

"Oh, Michael—you are stupid! How can I possibly tell you—if you won't understand."

Then she jumped up suddenly and swiftly brought her blue-despatch box from beside her writing-table and unlocked it with her bracelet key—while Michael with an anxious, puzzled face watched her intently. She sat down again beside him when she had found what she sought—the closed blue leather case which she had looked at so many times.

Digitized by Google

"If you are going to show me some brute's photograph I simply refuse to look," Michael said. "All that part of your life is over and we are going to begin afresh, darling one, no matter what you did."

But she crept nearer to him as she opened the case —and her voice was full and sweet, shy tenderness as she blurted out:

"It is not a brute's photograph, Michael, it is the picture of your own little son."

"My God!" cried Michael, the sudden violent emotion making him very pale. "Sabine—how dared you keep this from me all these years—I—" Then he seized her in his arms and for a few seconds they could neither of them speak—his caresses were so fierce. At last he exclaimed brokenly, "Sabine—with the knowledge of this between us how could you ever have even contemplated belonging to another man—Oh! if I had only known. Where is—my son?"

"You must listen, Michael, to everything," Sabine whispered, "then you will understand—I was simply terrified when I realized at last, and only wanted to go back to you and be comforted, so I wrote a letter at once to tell you, and as Mr. Parsons was in England again I sent it to him to have it put safely into your hands. But by then you had gone right off to China, and Mr. Parsons sent the letter back to me, it was useless to forward it to you, he said, you might not get it for a year."

Digitized by Google

Michael strained her to his heart once more, while his eyes grew wet.

"Oh, my poor little girl—all alone, how frightfully cruel it was, no wonder you hated me then, and could not forgive me even afterward."

"I did not hate you—I was only terrified and longing to rush off somewhere and hide—so Simone suggested San Francisco—the furthest off she knew, and we hurried over there and then I was awfully ill, and when my baby was born I very nearly died."

Michael was wordless, he could only kiss her. "That is what made him so delicate—my wretchedness and rushing about," she went on, "and so I was punished because, after three months, God took him back again—my dear little one—just when I was beginning to grow comforted and to love him. He was exactly like you, Michael, with the same blue eyes, and I thought—I thought, we should go back to Arranstoun and finish our estrangements and be happy again—the three of us—when you did come home—I grew radiant and quite well—" Here two big tears gathered in her violet eyes and fell upon Michael's hand, and he shivered with the intensity of his feelings as he held her close.

"We had made our plans to go East—but my little sweetheart caught cold somehow—and then he died—Oh! I can't tell you the grief of it, Michael, I was quite reckless after that—it was in June and I did not care what happened to me for a long while. I just

Digitized by Google

wanted to get back to Moravia, not knowing she had left Paris for Rome—and then I crossed in July—and came here to Brittany and saw and bought Héronac as I told you before. I heard then that you had not returned from China or made any sign—and it seemed all so cruel and ruthless, and as there were no longer any ties between us I thought that I would crush you from my life and forget you, and that I would educate myself and make something of my mind."

"Oh, my dear, my dear little girl," Michael sighed. "If you knew how all this is cutting me to the heart to think of the awful brute I have been—to think of you bearing things all alone—I somehow never realized the possibility of this happening—but once or twice when it did cross my mind I thought of course you would have cabled to me if so—I am simply appalled now at the casual selfishness of my behavior—can you ever forgive me, Sabine?"

She smoothed back his dark thick hair and looked into his bold eyes, now soft and glistening with tears.

"Of course I can forgive you, Michael—I belong to you, you see——"

So when he had kissed her enough in gratitude and contrition he besought her to go on.

"The years passed and I thought I had really forgotten you—and my life grew so peaceful with the Père Anselme and Madame Imogen here at Héronac, and all sorts of wonderful and interesting studies kept

Digitized by Google

developing for me. I seemed to grow up and realize things and the memory of you grew less and less—but society never held out any attractions for me—only to be with Moravia. I had taken almost a loathing for men; their actions seemed to me all cruel and predatory, not a single one attracted me in the least degree—until this summer at Carlsbad when we met Henry. And he appeared so good and true and kind—and I felt he could lift me to noble things and give me a guiding hand to greatness of purpose in life—I liked him—but I must tell you the truth, Michael, and you will see how small I am," here she held tightly to Michael's hand —"I do not think I would ever have promised him at Carlsbad that I would try to free myself only that I read in the paper that you were at Ostende—with Daisy Van der Horn. That exasperated me—even though I thought I was absolutely indifferent to you after five years. I had never seen your name in the paper before, it was the first indication I had had that you had come home—and the whole thing wounded my pride. I felt that I must ask for my freedom from you before you possibly could ask for yours from me. So I told Henry that very night that I had made up my mind."

"Oh! you dear little goose," Michael interrupted. "Not one of those ladies mattered to me more than the other—they were merely to pass the time of day, of no importance whatever."

Digitized by Google

"I dare say—but I am telling you my story, Michael— Well, Henry was so wonderful, so good—and it got so that he seemed to mean everything fine, he drew me out of myself and your shadow grew to mean less and less to me and I believed that I had forgotten you quite—except for the irritation I felt about Daisy—and then by that extraordinary turn of fate, Henry himself brought you here, and I did not even know the name of the friend who was coming with him; he had not told me in the hurried postscript of his letter saying he was bringing some one—I saw you both arrive from the lodge, and when I heard the tones of your voice—Ah! well, you can imagine what it meant!"

"No, I want to know, little darling—what did it mean?" and Michael looked into her eyes with fond command.

"It made my heart beat and my knees tremble and a strange thrill came over me—I ought to have known then that to feel like that did not mean indifference—oughtn't I?"

"I expect so—but what a moment it was when we did meet, you must come to that!"

"Arrogant, darling creature you are, Michael! You love to make me recount all these things," and Sabine looked so sweetly mutinous that he could not remain tranquilly listening for the moment, but had to make passionate love to her—whispering every sort of en-

Digitized by Google

dearment into her little ear—though presently she continued the recital of her story again:

"I stood there in the lodge after the shock of seeing you had passed, and I began to burn with every sort of resentment against you—I had had all the suffering and you had gone free—and I just felt I wanted to punish you by pretending not to know you! Think of it! How small—and yet there underneath I felt your old horribly powerful charm!"

"Oh, you did, did you! You darling," Michael exclaimed—and what do you suppose I felt—if we had only rushed there and then into each other's arms!"

"I was quite prepared for you in the garden—and did not I play my part well! You got quite white, you know with surprise—and I felt exquisitely excited. I could see you had come in all innocence—having probably forgotten our joking arrangement that I should call myself Mrs. Howard—I could not think why you did not speak out and denounce me. It hurt my pride, I thought it was because you wanted to divorce me and marry Daisy that you were indifferent about it. I did not know it was because you had given your word of honor to Henry not to interfere with the woman he loved. Then after dinner Henry told me you knew that he and I were practically engaged—that stung me deeply—it seemed to prove your indifference—so things developed and we met in the garden—Michael, was not that a wonderful hour! How we both acted. If you

Digitized by Google

had indicated by word or look that you remembered me, I could not have kept it up, we should have had to tell Henry then—we were playing at cross-purposes and my pride was wounded."

"I understand, sweetheart, go on."

"Well, I was miserable at luncheon, and then when you went out in the boat—being with you was like some intoxicating drink—I was more excited than I had ever been in my life. I was horrid toward Henry, I would not own it to myself, but I felt him to be the stumbling block in the way. So I was extra nice to him to convince myself—and I let him hold my arm, which I had never done before and you saw that in the garden. I suppose—and thought I loved him and so went—that was nice of you, Michael—but stupid, wasn't it!"

"Ridiculously stupid, everything I did was stupid that separated you from me. The natural action of my character would have been just to seize you again and carry you off resisting or unresisting to Arranstoun, but some idiotic sentiment of honor to Henry held me."

"I cried a little, I believe, when I got your note—I went up into this room and opened this dispatch-box and read your horrid letter again—and I believe I looked into the blue leather case, too"—here she opened it once more—and they both examined it tenderly. "Of course you can't see anything much in this little photograph—but he really was so like you, Michael, and

Digitized by Google

when I looked at it again after seeing you, I could have sobbed aloud, I wanted you so——"

"My dear, dear, little girl——"

"Henry had told me casually that afternoon your story, and how he had not stayed at Arranstoun for the wedding because he thought your action so unfair to the bride!—and how that now you felt rather a dog in the manger about her. That infuriated me! Can't you understand I had only one desire, to show you that I did not care since you had gone off. Henry was simply angelic to me—and asked me so seriously if he could really make me happy, if not he would release me then. I felt if he would take me, all bruised and restless, and comfort me and bring me peace, I did indeed wish to be his wife—and if nothing more had happened we might have grown quite happy from then, but we went to England—and I saw you again—and —Oh! well, Michael, need I tell you any more? You know how we fenced and how at last we could not bear it—up in Mrs. Forster's room!"

"It was the most delirious and most unhappy moment of my life, darling."

"And now it is all over—isn't Henry a splendid man? I told him all this yesterday—the Père Anselme had suggested to him to come and ask me for the truth. He behaved too nobly—but I did not know what he intended to do, nor if it were too late to stop the divorce or anything, so I was miserable."

Digitized by Google

"You shall not be so any more—we will go back to Arranstoun at once, darling, and begin a new and glorious life together. From every point of view that is the best thing to be done. We could not possibly go on all staying here, it would be grotesque—and I am quite determined that I will never leave you again —do you hear, Sabine?" And he turned her face and made her look into his eyes.

"Yes, I hear!—and know that you were always the most masterful creature!"

"Do you want to change me?"

But Sabine let herself be clasped in his arms while she abandoned herself to the deep passionate joy she felt.

"No—Michael—I would not alter you in one little bit, we are neither of us very good or very clever, but I just love you and you love me—and we are mates! There!"

* * * * * * *

They carried out their plans and arrived at Arranstoun Castle a few days later. Michael wired to have everything ready for their reception and both experienced the most profound emotion when first they entered Michael's sitting-room again.

"There is the picture, darling, that you fell through and—here is Binko waiting to receive and welcome you!"

Digitized by Google

The mass of fat wrinkles got up from his basket and condescended, after showing a wild but suppressed joy at the sight of his master, to be re-introduced to his mistress who expressed due appreciation of his beauty.

"That old dog has been my only confidant about you, Sabine, ever since I came back—he could tell you how frantic I was, couldn't you, Binko?"

Binko slobbered his acquiescence and then the tea was brought in; Sabine sat down to pour it out in the very chair she had sat in long ago. She was taller now, but still her little feet did not reach the ground.

The most ecstatic happiness was permeating them both, and it all seemed like a divine dream to be there together and alone. They reconstructed every incident of their first meeting in a fond duet—each supplying a link, and they talked of all their new existence together and what it would mean, and presently Michael drew Sabine toward the chapel where the lights were all lit.

"Darling," he whispered, "I want to make new vows of love and tenderness to you here, because to-night is our real wedding night—I want you to forget that other one and blot it right out."

But Sabine moved very close to him as she clung to his arm, and her whole soul was in her eyes as she answered:

"I do not want to forget it. I know very well that I had begun to love you even then. But, Michael—do

Digitized by Google

you remember that undecorated window which you told me had been left so probably for you to embellish as an expiatory offering, because rapine and violence were in the blood— Well, dear love, I think we must put up the most beautiful stained glass together there—in memory of our little son. For we are equally to blame for his brief life and death."

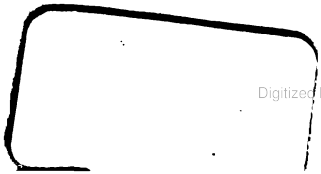
But Michael was too moved to speak and could only clasp her hand.

(1)

THE END

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google